"THE SHADOW FOLK" by EDMOND HAMILTON

SEPTEMBER

Weird Tales

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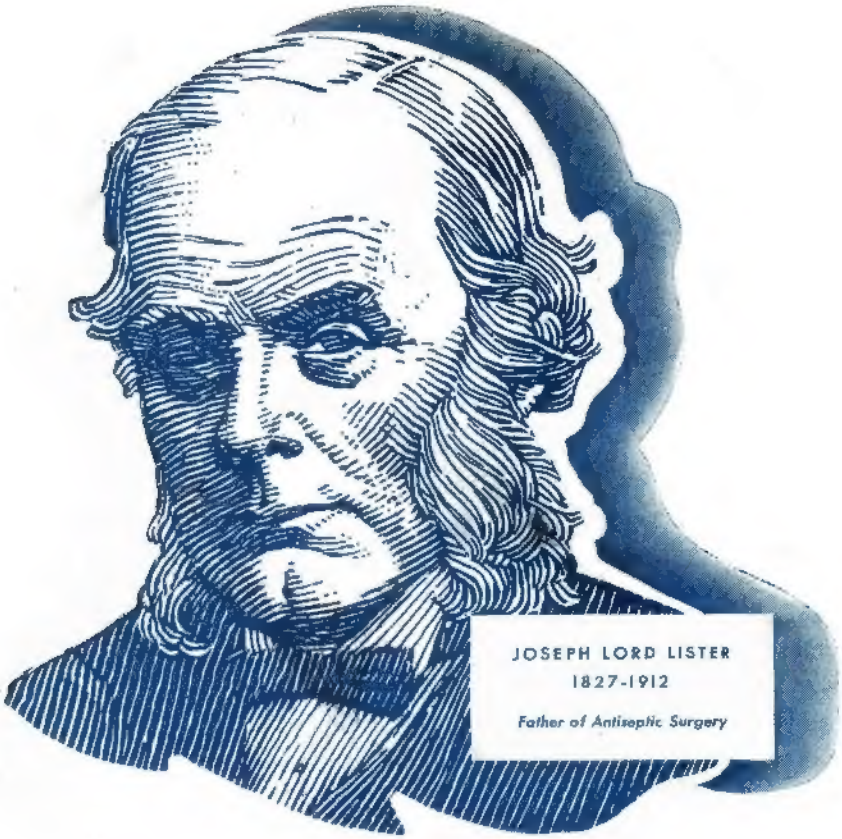
BLOCH

BRADBURY

WELLMAN

by Frank Owen

"THE LONG STILL STREETS OF EVENING"



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ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental

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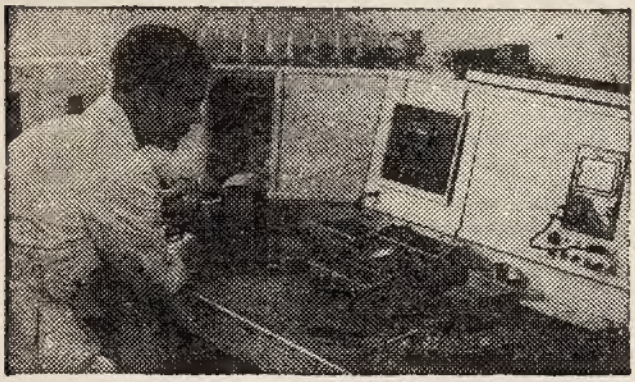

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The Shadow Folk

IT WAS a spring morning when word came through the mountains that the Others had come back. Khar brought the word, and Nura was the first to hear the terrifying news.

She was gathering berries in a sun-dappled thicket that fringed the dark, solemn Sierra forest, when she glimpsed a misty flash of movement and saw the figure running toward her.

Nura reached for her spear and then remembered she had left it by the stream in the nearby valley of alders, after a fruitless attempt at fishing. But she relaxed when she saw that the runner was one of the Shadow Folk.

For, to Nura's eyes, he had that strange, semi-transparent appearance which to her was normal. She could see the trees through him, as though he were a running, living figure of glass.

"What now, Khar?" she demanded a little imperiously as he came up. "I thought you were hunting with Lan and Skuro."

She thought nothing of the kind. She thought that Khar had slipped away from his comrades to continue his vain courtship of her.

But Khar looked as though he had other things on his mind, now. He was a big man, biggest of all the Shadow Folk. A shock-haired giant in a leather tunic, carrying a heavy deer-spear, both his clothing and weapons were as semi-transparent to her eyes as his body.

"I've got to warn the tribe," he panted. "The Others have come back."

Nura felt the sharp shock of a terror that a thousand generations of surreptitious living had bred into her folk.

"The Others?" she gasped. "But they never come back into the high mountains so early as this."

Khar waved a hand toward the spring-green meadows and budding woods, and the towering High Sierra peaks whose snow-caps were already very small.

"It is warm early this year," he said. "That is why they have come so soon."

Nura dropped her berries. "My father is with the tribe now," she told him. "I'll go with you."

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Khar did not slacken his haste as he ran with her through the woods—nor did he have to. Nura's slim, lithe figure, shadowy and half-transparent to his eyes as he to hers, concealed a strength and endurance that was bred early into all the Shadow Folk.

Her mind was filled with alarm and dismay as she ran. The safe, happy season of winter was gone, now. The months when heavy snows blocked the high trails were months of freedom for her people, for then the Others never came.

Now, so soon, had begun the long summer months of anxiety and watchfulness, the season when her people must walk with care each moment and post sentinels on every trail, and lower their voices to whispers.

"Why don't the Others stay down below?" she asked resentfully as they ran. "They have all the rest of the world for their own."

Khar shrugged massive shoulders. "I don't know. It has always been so."

THAT was the answer the Shadow Folk always gave to the wondering questions of their children. But Nura felt rebellious now.

These high, remote peaks were the last refuge for the strangest race of humans in all the world

It wasn't fair! The Others had crowded them into this last refuge, and now even this was being taken away. Every summer, more of the Others came even into these high, remote peaks.

She and Khar emerged from the forest in front of a blank cliff beyond which rocky crags shouldered the sky. He swung aside the big rock that cunningly masked the

mouth of a crack-like chasm in the precipice.

She had to follow behind Khar, the chasm was so narrow. But soon it widened into a blind canyon, of considerable width and with precipitous sides.

On the ledges on one side were the caves in which her tribe had their homes. But now most of the Shadow Folk here were down in the warm sunlight of the canyon floor.

The glassy, semi-transparent figures that Nura's eyes beheld were not strange to her. This was home, her people. Children played along the banks of the foaming little creek. Women worked industriously at the dyeing of skins and old men shaped spearheads or gossiped in the sun.

THE oldest men sat in a little group around Nugor, the chieftain. Nura ran toward him, bursting to tell her father the news. But Khar got it out first.

"The Others have come! We saw them at the small house in the valley of alders. I came on ahead to warn you."

Nugor's aging, bearded face showed sharp alarm. "How many of them are there?" he asked quickly.

"Only two," Khar said. "One I have seen before. He is the trapper who built the little house. The other one, I have never seen."

The tribe had quickly gathered around. The gravity of the news was mirrored on every face. They had expected the Others, of course. But not so soon.

Nura felt a little pride in the way they all looked to her father. Khar might be the greatest hunter in the tribe, but it was still to old Nugor that the Shadow Folk turned for guidance.

"Who of our people are out of the valley now?" he wanted to know.

A half-dozen voices babbled answer. A woman's husband had gone to set a fish-trap. Some half-grown boys were seeking material for arrows. There was a party of three women who had gone out after certain roots.

"Send to warn them at once," Nugor ordered. "And post the sentinels on all the trails."

"I told Lan and Skuro to watch the trails west of the alder valley, until we had time to send sentinels," put in Khar.

Nugor nodded. "That was well done. We might have been caught by surprise. Never before have any of the Others come so early."

The flurry of activity was followed by the realization of what the coming of the Others meant.

"We have not yet finished the spring food-gathering in the farther woods!" protested a tribesman anxiously. "The fish have not been smoked, and the deer-skins are not all tanned."

"We shall have to get along with less until next winter," Nugor said firmly. "From now on, only those on urgent errands may go into the farther forests."

Dismay circulated among the tribe at the prospect. It meant a longer period of watchfulness and worry, and it meant a much scanter food supply until winter finally came again.

One young hunter voiced a spirit of rebellion. "There are only two of the Others. If they were not here, we could continue to gather our food as before. It would be easy for us to kill them."

A gasp of horror went up from the older men and women, yet a few of the bolder spirits among the young hunters voiced agreement.

Nugor's voice was loud with anger. "Are you mad to suggest such a thing? You know the law!"

"The law will not fill our children's stomachs this summer," muttered one of the rebellious ones.

Nugor spoke flatly. "The law has kept us alive all these ages. And the law says—

"Never must the Others know that we exist! Never must one of the Shadow Folk let them suspect our presence!"

"If you killed these two, more of the Others would come searching for them. Where then would we take refuge?"

That silenced them. The tradition of the law was too ingrained to permit any of them to voice further objection.

"From henceforth until the snows come, none is to go near the farther woods without permission," Nugor declared. "I know that you have all been careful as ever to leave no traces of us anywhere."

Nura, listening, felt a sudden pang of guilty remembrance. Her spear! She had left it at the stream in the valley of alders —and that stream was very near the house of the Others!

SHE was appalled. It had been an inexcusable oversight, twice inexcusable in a chieftain's daughter. She had meant to go back for the spear when the berries were picked, but had forgotten it in the excitement of Khar's news. It had been sheer carelessness.

She dreaded her father's wrath if he learned of it. Yet the spear must be recovered at any cost. If it should accidentally be found by one of the Others, the very nature of the weapon would betray the whole secret of the Shadow Folk's existence.

Nura quickly determined to retrieve the spear herself without mentioning it to anyone.

With that purpose in mind, she slipped away in the flurry of activity and went back out of the canyon.

Khar was posting sentinels outside the masked entrance of their valley. "Where are you going, Nura?" he wanted to know.

"I know where Skuro's wife and the others are gathering roots, and I am going to warn them," she told him, and hurried away.

Her heart was pounding with excitement and apprehension as she ran through the forest toward the valley of alders. Suppose one of the Others had chanced upon the spear already?

She came into the valley, moving warily. In the distance, she could see through trees the log cabin with its stone chimney—the house of the Others. And she could see the two Others standing on its porch and talking.

They were instantly recognizable as Others. For they were opaque and solid-looking and non-transparent, unlike the Shadow Folk. And they wore the strange, tight-fitting clothing which Others always wore.

Nura poised, listening to them. She could understand. Her people, through their years of spying on the Others, had learned the language and taught it to their children. They had done so because, more than once, ability to understand that language had meant escape from discovery.

The older Other, the whiskered trapper who had built the cabin, was speaking.

"If it's peace and quiet you want, you'll sure get 'em here, Doctor Grant," he was saying. "It's so early there ain't a soul in these mountains yet."

"I don't want to see people," the younger man replied in a tired voice. "Now that the war's over, I need to rest and get my bearings for a while before I can live down in the city."

He looked as tired as his voice, Nura thought, this young stranger called Doctor Grant. His face was thin and lined, his shoulders sagged as from long fatigue.

"Well, I'll bring you up some grub when I come back," the older man said. "I'll be comin' up often to look at my traps."

Nura saw the old man mount his horse and start down the trail. She understood then that the young, tired-looking one of the Others was going to stay alone in the cabin.

The old trapper rode by within six feet of where Nura stood. She remained perfectly still and unafraid. He could not see her, she knew.

That was the one great advantage of the Shadow Fork. They could see each other, as semi-transparent figures. But the Others could not see them at all. Their eyes were somehow different.

Her confidence was justified. The trapper rode whistling past her and disappeared down the trail. The young Other turned to enter the cabin.

This was Nura's chance. She slipped across the trail to the little creek that ran through the valley of alders. Stepping into its icy, shallow waters, she started softly wading upstream.

"Leave no tracks for the Others to see!"

That was one of the prime commandments of the law. It was why she had taken to the stream in her search for the spear.

Her eyes nervously searched the bank. There had been a little point, where she had crouched hoping for a big trout—

THE spear was there! She felt a throb of relief as she saw it, lying on the bank. It was semi-transparent as her own body and clothing. The Others could not see it,

but they might have stepped on it and discovered its invisible existence.

She waded eagerly to the bank and then reached for the spear. Something gave under her foot, there was a jarring *click,* and a vise-like agony seized her left ankle.

Nura went to her knees in the shallow water, with a muffled cry of agony and surprise. Her ankle was still held in the agonizing grip. She had stepped into one of the traps the old Other had set!

"What's that?"

Grant had turned from the cabin he was entering, and now was staring nervously along the stream and trail. He had heard her.

Nura instantly stiffened into complete immobility. A fear icier than the waters in which she knelt paralyzed her body.

She could see the Other looking perplexedly. Nura felt panic as he started down the trail, puzzledly staring along the stream.

She dug her hands into the water and frantically sought to free herself from the trap. The heavy steel jaws resisted her strength. And she had to stop, for she was flurrying the water.

The Other had noticed that flurry! He was coming along the bank toward her. And he was chuckling in nervous relief.

"So that's it! One of the old-timer's traps has nabbed a muskrat already."

Nura felt a chill of horror. The man was going to examine the trap. It meant discovery, for her and for all the Shadow Folk.

She reached and frantically snatched up her spear. She had to kill the Other, now. There was no way out of it. She crouched, ready to drive the spear upward into his heart as he bent over the bank.

Grant owed his life to the trap he was stooping to examine. As he grasped its chain to pull it up out of the water, Nura stabbed. But the hold on her ankle twisted her aim awry, and the spear stabbed through Grant's jacket instead of through his breast.

"What the devil!" Grant exclaimed hoarsely, recoiling.

There was nothing before him, yet he had felt the savage rip of something through his suede jacket. And a slitted hole had suddenly appeared in it beneath his armpit.

His hands, striking out in an instinctive gesture to repel the unknown, came into contact with her warm flesh. He yelled in incredulous surprise.

Nura was frantically trying to pull the spear out of his jacket for another stab. But its barb was caught in the tough leather. She succeeded only in pulling Grant off the bank upon her.

His weight flung her backward into the shallow stream. Her head struck the flat stones beneath the few inches of water, and Nura felt blackness explode inside her brain.

She awoke, when consciousness returned to her, with the swiftness of alarm. She was lying on the bank of the stream. And the Other was bending over her, his face ludicrous with stupefied amazement as his hands touched her soft hair and her face.

"My God, a girl!" he was saying thickly. "A totally invisible girl! It's crazy—"

Nura shivered to a horror greater than she had ever known. She had committed the unpardonable sin again the law. She had let one of the Others know that the Shadow Folk existed.

Not within the living memory of any in the tribe had such a thing happened. It was the ultimate disaster, always feared and always guarded against.

"I'm either mad," Grant was saying hoarsely, "or else—"

Nura bounded up with a frantic effort that flung him aside. She threw herself away in panic flight.

The trap was still on her ankle. And its chain, tautening as she leaped, brought her down. She uttered a little cry.

GRANT jumped toward her. To him, there had been nothing visible but the spectacle of the steel trap flying to the length of its chain and then stopping short.

His groping hands found her again, but instantly she was clawing wildly at him.

"Wait!" he said hoarsely. "I'm not going to hurt you, whoever you are—"

Nura was beyond reason, in her panic and horror. She fought him like a wildcat.

He finally succeeded in pinioning her arms. Her strength seemed to be waning as the agony of her ankle increased, and she lay limp in his arms as he picked her up.

He unsnapped the trap-chain from its stake, and started toward the cabin. Inside

it, he locked its door and then put her down on a bunk.

"Listen, I'm not going to harm you!" he pleaded earnestly. "I just want to help you. I don't know whether you're really invisible or whether I'm out of my head, but—"

Nura found her voice. She could not escape this man by use of her strength. The very touch of the alien Other inspired her with a terror that gave her voice.

"Please let me go!" she gasped, in his own language. "Please!"

"I'm *not* crazy, then, if you can talk," Grant said dazedly. His hand reached, and touched her face. She shuddered at the contact. "But invisible—"

He seemed to get a grip on himself, and spoke more steadily. "I can't let you go like this. Your ankle's crushed, you won't be able to stand, let alone walk. If you have friends near—"

THAT brought the fear sharply back into Nura's mind—the fear for the tribe that was instilled into all the Shadow Folk. This Other had found her, but he must not discover the tribe.

"I have no friends!" she flashed. And then, again, "Let me go!"

"Not with that trap on your ankle," Grant said determinedly. "This may all be just a daytime nightmare, but the trap is real enough."

He tried to pry open its jaws and could not. Then he remembered and reached under the bunk for the steel clamp he had seen the old man toss there.

"This will hurt you," he told the girl he could not see. "But we have to get the thing off."

As the jaws were pried loose, Nura felt an exquisite agony. For the second time, she lost consciousness.

She awoke more slowly, this time. She was still lying in the bunk. Her ankle throbbed with fiery pain.

It was night. The Other was bending over a fire across the room, with his back toward her.

Nura softly lowered herself from the bunk and started toward the door. At the first step, the injured ankle gave way under her and she sprawled on the floor.

Grant turned, startled by the crash. He started toward the bunk, then tripped over her as she tried frantically to regain her feet.

Nura was in too much pain to resist as he awkwardly groped and picked her up, and carried her back to the bunk. She felt hopeless.

"Now listen to me," he said earnestly. "You must not try that again. I'm a doctor, and you can believe me when I say you can't possibly walk on that ankle for days. Just who you are or why I can't see you, I don't know, but no one is going to harm you."

Nura, looking up into his face, felt a slight lessening of her despair. This Other seemed sincere. She was much less afraid of him now. But the one agonizing anxiety in her mind persisted.

"You will not tell any more of the Others about us?" she asked pleadingly.

"About *us?*" he repeated. "Then there are more of you, invisible like yourself?"

Nura was appalled at her slip of the tongue. He sensed the dismay behind her silence, and spoke reassuringly.

"Don't be afraid. I promise not to tell a soul. No one else ever comes here except old Johnny, the trapper, anyway."

The promise comforted her a little. She knew that she shouldn't put any faith in one of the Others, for they were alien and unknowable. Yet she did, somehow, believe in this one's assurance.

"Can't you tell me about yourself?" he asked her. "Have you always been like this, completely invisible?"

"Yes, of course," said Nura.

Grant shook his head. "My reason tells me I'm up here having hallucinations. But I'm hanged if I believe my reason."

Presently he brought her food. Much of it was strange to her, but she liked it.

He sat, watching her eat. He seemed stunned by the fact that the food became invisible as she ate it.

"By heaven, it's against all the rules of physics, chemistry and biology," he murmured.

Later he spread blankets for himself in the far corner of the cabin, and then told her: "I want you to make a promise in return. Don't try to leave here. You can't

possibly go more than a few steps anyway, and you'll only hurt yourself."

Nura reluctantly promised. She would not have done so but that her experience had taught her she could not escape.

For the next few days, she stayed in the cabin not unhappily. Grant carefully tended her ankle, and she learned now that he was a healer among the Others, and that Doctor was not his name but his title.

Never had Nura dreamed that she could feel liking for an Other. But she did. This young, tired-looking man with the wise ways of healing and the oddly gentle touch soon won her complete confidence.

So much so, that she told him of the Shadow Folk who were her people. He had guessed their existence anyway, she knew.

Grant listened with incredulous amazement. "And you say that your people have lived here for centuries, invisible? Good Lord, a whole different species of man, completely unsuspected by the rest of us!"

"The legends of my people say that long, long ago there were no Shadow Folk," Nura told him. "Everywhere then, all the people were like you Others. Then to those people were born a few children, here and there, who were invisible to the rest of the people."

Grant frowned thoughtfully. "What you are describing is known as a mutation. There could have been strange mutants in prehistoric human times, I suppose. But mutants who were invisible—"

"It was their blood that made them so," Nura affirmed. "Our blood is different from the blood of the Others. We know that is true."

Grant started. "So that's it! I *thought* your blood was weirdly different when I tested a drop from your wound. It was radioactive blood."

HE REFLECTED aloud. "That was the mutation, humans with the power to assimilate radioactive matter into the blood. The chemical contagion would pervade the whole body with its force, and cause a polarization of every cell and atom to the point of perfect transparency."

Nura did not understand his speculations. She went on with her tale. "The Others to whom the invisible ones were born did not like them—they feared them. And they drove them out, seeking to kill them.

"So the invisible ones gathered together in their own tribes of Shadow Folk. They kept as far as possible away from the Others. When the Others came into a country, my people would leave it and go further into the wilds.

"But you Others have always come, and always we have had to find new refuge. For our safety was in not letting you know of our existence. Now the last tribes of us in this land have, for three generations dwelt only in these high mountains."

Grant asked a question. "But Nura, how do you make things like your leather tunic and your spear invisible?"

"We dye them," she answered simply. "The secret of the dye is as old as our people. It is made of certain herbs to which a small quantity of our blood is each time added."

He began to understand. "Then I was right. The chemical agent of invisibility resides in your radioactive blood."

He speculated excitedly. "And it may be that same powerful chemical agent that makes your eye-retinas sensitive enough to see each other a little by ultra-violet, and also makes your food disappear as soon as you eat it. Lord, how all this would upset the scientific world!"

She grasped his arm anxiously. "Grant, you will not tell? You promised!"

He patted her hand soothingly. "I won't tell, Nura. Do you think I want you hailed as a freak, mobbed by curiosity-seekers? Your people's secret is safe."

She became happy in that assurance. And during the next days, as her ankle slowly healed, she felt no pang of homesickness.

She knew the Shadow Folk must be mystified by her disappearance, that her father and the others would be terribly worried. That was the only cloud upon her happiness.

Grant too was happy. He told himself that it was a crazy kind of happiness, that he was insane to fall in love as he was doing with this shy, sweet girl whom he could not see.

One evening, sitting beside her, he made an impulsive request. "Nura, I want to

know what you really look like. Will you let me?"

He had put his hands to her face. His fingers, the sensitive fingers of a surgeon, explored her clear features.

"Why, you're beautiful, Nura! Or you would be, if I could see you."

His hands lingered. He suddenly bent forward and kissed her. It was strangely, uncannily sweet, kissing the soft, parted lips he could not see.

Nura gasped. For a moment she struggled. Then he felt the shy returning pressure of her lips.

"Nura—good Lord, I love you!" he stammered.

She sobbed suddenly. "It is impossible. I belong to the Shadow folk, you to the Others."

"And that makes not a spark of difference!" he asserted, tightening his arms around her.

He decided. "We can stay here together. I won't go back to the city."

For a week, they knew unalloyed happiness. But the end of that happy period came swiftly.

NURA looked forth from the window of the cabin one morning to see a glassy, semi-transparent figure crossing the trail outside. It was Khar. And she knew from his bearing that he was searching for her.

She clutched Grant's arm. "My people are still searching for me! One of them is out there now!"

He stared from the window. He could see nothing, and said so.

"Of course you cannot see him," she whispered. "But he is there. He is looking along the valley. Wait—now he is going!"

Grant felt an uncanny chill. There had been something terrifying about the visitation. But he tried to soothe her fears.

"They'll give up the search. And even if they do find you, couldn't you explain about us?"

"No!" Horror was in her voice. "They would kill you for knowing about them, Grant."

"But nobody can see you to find you, anyway—" he began, and then remembered.

"The Shadow Folk can see me, as easily as I see them. If I stay here with you, they will find me sooner or later. You must let me go back to them."

"Let you go? No!" he declared. "If we can't stay here, then we'll go back to my own home in the city."

She said hopelessly, "You know that I cannot. How can I live among the Others?"

"I have an idea, Nura," he replied. "You wait and see."

THE old trapper from whom he had rented the cabin came back the next day. Nura remained silent and unseen in a corner while Grant gave the man a list of the things he wanted.

"My wife is going to join me here," he explained. "She'll need those things."

The old fellow went away. He returned two days later with the things that Grant had ordered.

Nura looked at them puzzledly. There were a dress, shoes, stockings, and a number of small bottles and jars.

"Nura, would you mind if you had to be visible like us Others?" he asked her earnestly. "If it meant we could stay together?"

"I would not mind then," she said wonderingly. "But how could you do that?"

Grant's plan was simple. He had her put on the dress, the opaque stockings, the shoes. When this was done, she looked weirdly like a headless, armless woman.

He used smooth cosmetic cream on her face and arms and hands, and over it put flesh-tinted powder and lipstick. The white tooth-paint used in motion-picture make-up made her fine teeth visible. A dark stain for her hair made that also visible as a black, glossy mass.

Dark glasses to hide Nura's eyes, which could not otherwise be changed, completed the make-up. She looked like any normal, visible girl.

"Nura, to all appearances you're one of the Others now," he said. "Can you stand it for a while?"

She smiled. "I don't mind it. And now you will be able to see me, Grant."

He kissed her. "We'll leave tomorrow."

They started the next morning, riding down the trail on the horses that the trapper had brought. A mile down the trail, Nura received a shock as they rounded a curve.

Khar and Skuro were coming up the

trail! The two hunters, completely invisible to Grant, instantly darted to the side of the trail and waited there silent and motionless for the Others to pass.

After they had ridden by, Nura was trembling with apprehension. To Khar's eyes, she surely must have looked only like a girl of the Others. But if he *had* recognized her—

For her life, she could not help looking nervously back at them. Khar and Skuro were staring after them. And she saw Khar start in excitement, and run forward as he perceived her looking back at him.

Too late, Nura realized her mistake. By looking back at them, she had shown that she was aware of their presence—and only one of the Shadow Folk could see them. She had betrayed herself.

"Grant, ride faster!" she cried wildly, and spurred the horse.

The two mounts clattered down the steep trail. Khar and Skuro were soon left from sight behind. But when they reached the lowlands two hours later, Nura was still trembling.

"They knew it was me, Grant! I know they did, when they saw me look back at them. And they'll follow us!"

"There's no chance of that," he reassured her. "How could they follow all the way down to the city, and find us?"

"The Shadow Folk can go through any city," Nura answered frightenedly. "And though they almost never do, they will now because they think I have betrayed the secret of their existence to you. They will want to kill you before the world learns of them from you."

He made light of her fears. More light than he felt, for that uncanny chill had returned to him when he learned how he had passed within arms' reach of the hunters without seeing or suspecting them.

WHEN they came down to the city below the mountains, Nura was bewildered. Never had she dreamed that there were so many of the Others, nor that they possessed such strange buildings and vehicles.

Grant took her to the little suburban house that had always before seemed to him an oppressively lonely place. They were married at once, and who was to guess that the pretty bride in dark glasses was really one of the Shadow Folk?

Nura was happy in the little house. The nearness of Grant compensated for the strangeness of everything else.

"You're sure that you won't ever want to go back to your own people?" he asked her earnestly.

She shook her head. "I want to stay with you always. I do not want them to take me away from you."

Grant smiled at that recurring fear. "They will never find you, Nura."

He too was happy as he had never been before. Her warmth and love and laughter seemed to have washed his mind clean of those dark years of war and loneliness that had driven him for refuge to the mountains.

He mused, many times, on the thunderous sensation that would be created if he disclosed the existence of the Shadow Folk and showed Nura as a living proof. But he was never in the slightest tempted to astound the world by doing so. He knew it would mean the end of their secret happiness—and he had promised her that he would not.

But one day, Grant was a little troubled when he came home to the little house and she was not there. He called her name, but there was no answer. Then a hand out of nothingness touched his face, and gay, delighted laughter rang in his ears.

"Nura, is that you?" he demanded, startled. "You've taken off your make-up, made yourself invisible again?"

"You are not angry, Grant?" coaxed her voice. Her invisible figure snuggled in his arms. "It was only an impulse."

She had, he learned, put on the invisible leather tunic she had brought with her from the mountains, and had wandered for hours in the nearby park.

"I wanted to feel like I used to, for a little while," she confessed.

Grant was troubled. Later that evening, when Nura had again become like the Others, he reverted to it.

"Nura, you're sure that you're not homesick for the mountains?" he pressed.

She answered frankly. "A little. I like the free forest-wandering better than cities. But do not worry. I will never leave you to go back there."

Grant was reassured. For he had always a haunting fear of losing her, of being thrust back into the black loneliness of the former years.

In all, four weeks had fled by when the sudden shadow of disaster came upon them. On that afternoon, driving with Grant through the crowded central part of the city, Nura saw the Shadow Folk.

There were two of them, whom she recognized as Lan and Skuro, standing just beside a crowded corner and eyeing the passing throngs. No one of the Others could see those two tall, spear-armed hunters, of course. But to her, their figures were glassily visible.

"Grant, go from here quickly!" she cried.

He turned the car. And then she saw along the adjoining street there were other of the Shadow Folk, other hunters searching.

They were adroitly avoiding contact with the passing Others who never dreamed of their presence. She thought she recognized Khar.

"And I fear they saw us," she cried. "They will follow and find us—"

Grant's chin set. "Even if they did, I wouldn't let them take you away from me."

Nura's voice had agony in it. "It is not only that. They will surely kill you, Grant. No Other may be killed unless he knows of the Shadow Folk, and then he must die. It is the law."

She would not let him go out of the house all that day or the next. She watched constantly from the windows.

And that next night, looking out into the moonlit garden around the house, she uttered a frightened cry that brought him running to her side.

"They have found us, Grant!"

He drew the pistol he had kept in his pocket all day, and looked forth with her.

But he could see nothing but the moonlit lawn and trees, peaceful and silent.

"Are you sure, Nura?"

"There are several of them around the house," she said, terrified. "Listen, they are trying the door!"

Grant felt a cold apprehension make ice around his heart. What could he do with any kind of a weapon against men he could not see?

He thought wildly of telephoning the police. And then he sickly realized the futility of such a course. What could he tell them—that a band of invisible men were besieging his house? What could he show them?

GLASS shattered somewhere in the back of the house. He started on a run in that direction, his pistol raised.

He heard the thud of feet on the floor, but the lighted dining room and kitchen were empty. Then Nura screamed.

"Khar, *no*!"

Grant heard the rush of feet and heavy breathing, and threw himself desperately aside. He felt an unseen spear graze past his sleeve.

His hair bristled on his neck at the horror of this hopeless battle against men he could not see. It was like a fight against ghosts—ghosts who could kill.

Nura was crying wildly to him. "Grant, get away! Quick, before they—"

She was cut off as unseen hands gripped her. Grant, springing to her rescue, caromed into a solid, leather-clad body.

He smashed out with his fists and bruised them against unseen flesh and bone. But other hands were gripping him from behind. He was held by the arms, and his wild struggles were useless

A man's heavy voice rang out in command from the far side of the room. "Kill the Other quickly."

"Father, no!" screamed Nura. "If you kill Grant, I will not go back with you. I will take my own life!"

There was a pause of silence for a moment.

A spear-point was pricking Grant's throat, and he knew that the man who held it stood directly in front of him, though the electric light poured down on—nothing.

Old Nugor was speaking wrathfully to the girl. "Then you have fallen in love with this Other?"

"He is my mate," Nura flashed. "If he dies, then I too will die."

"Nura, no!" Grant exclaimed. "You can't save me—"

She paid him no attention. She was speaking to her father.

"Father, I will go back with you to the

tribe. But only if you leave Grant alive and unharmed here."

"It cannot be!" exclaimed Nugor's heavy, troubled voice. "The Other knows of the Shadow Folk's existence and so he must die lest all the Others come to know. It is the law."

"But he will not tell anyone else of us," Nura pleaded. "He promised me he would not, and he has kept that promise. If he had told, would not the Others by now already have searched out our tribe?"

"It seems that it is true he has not told," muttered Nugor.

The strong voice of Khar, from directly in front of Grant, asked, "Shall I kill?"

Nugor's answer was slow. "No, do not kill. We leave the Other here alive if he swears never to speak of the Shadow Folk and never to come back to the mountains."

Grant burst out furiously. "If you take Nura with you, I'm coming after her."

"Grant, do not say that!" begged the girl. "It would mean death if you came."

Her voice had a heartbroken quality as she went on. "It is as I feared from the beginning. You are of the Others, I of the Shadow Folk. Our happiness could not endure."

Grant felt a despair that choked him. It seemed to him that all the new light and warmth in his life was going out like a snuffed candle with Nura's departure. Ahead of him stretched a sick vista of lonely years.

HE WOULDN'T *let* her be taken from him! The fierce resolve unleashed in his mind an idea upon which he had often speculated. He saw it now as the only possible solution of his tragic dilemma.

Nura had been removing the make-up and clothing that made her look like one of the Others. She had put on her own former leather garment, had become wholly invisible again.

"It is well—you are once again of the Shadow Folk," approved Nugor's voice. "Now let us go."

"Wait!" Grant begged. "Nura, ask them if they won't give you a little time alone with me before they take you. Tell them it is to say goodbye."

When Nugor and the others heard, they seemed to hesitate. "No tricks, Other!" warned the old chieftain's voice. "You cannot escape with Nura from this house."

"I give you my word that I'm not going to try," Grant answered.

His sincerity convinced them. For they released him and let him go with Nura into the small room that was his office.

Nura came into his arms, warm, breathing and invisible. She was sobbing.

"It is goodbye, then, Grant. I wish—"

"Not goodbye yet," he interrupted tensely. "Nura, I have an idea that may prevent our separation. If it succeeds, we can be together always. But if it fails, it means death."

Her unseen hands gripped his arms. "I will try anything, Grant! I am not afraid of death."

He had not told her that it was *his* death, not hers, that would result if his wild hypothesis was a failure.

Feverishly, Grant rummaged among his medical equipment, rapidly assembling instruments.

"Lie down upon this table beside the couch, Nura. Let me have your arm."

The invisibility of her made what he was attempting a difficult task. But the fingers of a surgeon work as much by touch as by sight. Grant deftly made the incision he needed in the girl's unseen arm.

He made a similar incision in his own flesh.

The clamps and tubes and pump went into place, connecting the incisions. He started his apparatus.

"Grant, what are you doing?" came her startled question.

"Nura, it's the radioactive quality of your blood that makes you Shadow Folk transparent and invisible," he said tautly. "I'm sure of that, for even a tinge of it enabled you to make the dye that renders any organic matter as invisible as yourself.

"I believe," he said, "that a transfusion of your blood will introduce the radioactive contagion into *my* bloodstream also. And if it succeeds in doing so, I will become like you."

"You will become one of the Shadow Folk?" cried the girl. She was dazed. "You, an Other—"

He smiled haggardly at her. "The differ-

ence between us, the barrier between us, will be gone forever if it succeeds."

He did not tell her of the risk it meant. The strange blood might kill him instantly. Or its radioactive content, as he hoped, might cause it to so transcend the ordinary rules of blood-group affinities, that his wild attempt would succeed.

He felt a rapid, growing sickness as Nura's blood flowed into his veins. By the time he was ready to stop the transfusion, he was so shaken and sick that he could hardly remove the clamps and tubes.

"You are still the same, Grant," came her fearful voice.

He tried to answer, but could not. His veins seemed to be on fire, his brain exploding, as the radioactive contagion spread like flame through every cell of his blood and body.

It was to be death, then? Well, better death than the long loneliness and despair—

"Grant, you are *fading!*" came the girl's awed voice.

He raised his head weakly, looked down at himself. He felt an incredulous wonder.

His hands were becoming slowly semi-transparent, glassy, phantom-like. Already he could vaguely see the sides of the room through them.

He turned, in wild joy. And he discovered that as his own body faded from solidity, he was increasingly able to see Nura's hitherto invisible face and figure. The radioactive contagion was sensitivizing his eye-retinas too, as he had hoped.

Transparent, shadow-like, still he could *see* her. He stumbled weakly to her side and held her in his arms.

By the time Grant and the girl came out of the little room, the process was complete. He felt no further ill effects. His body was completely invisible.

And he could now see Nugor and Khar and the other two men who waited. They stared at him wildly.

"The Other—he has become one of the Shadow Folk!" cried Khar.

Grant nodded. "I am going back with you—and Nura."

SUNSET gilded the mountain trails as the six Shadow Folks climbed a steep pathway. Far above and ahead of them loomed the high peaks that were their goal. The plain and its cities was receding below.

Grant walked with his arm around Nura. He was wearing his own clothing, which the dye of the tribe had made as invisible as his body. He was very happy.

From Khar, in the lead, came a whisper of warning. "Other's are coming."

They stepped to the side of the trail and stood quietly as the Others came down, noisily chattering. There were a dozen of them, hikers returning from a tramp in the foothills.

They went past within a yard of the six silent Shadow Folk, looking through them unseeingly. When their voices had died away, Khar nodded.

"Now we can go on."

Grant remained a moment, looking back down to the plain upon which the white towns and the distant city glittered in the sunset.

"You are not sorry to be leaving your people?" Nura asked him anxiously.

He smiled, and shook his head. "I had no ties to hold me there. And I am glad to be one of the Shadow Folk."

Nura was eager. "You have the wisdom of the Others, and you can help my people very much. Yes, you will be chieftain of us all some day."

Grant too had had that vision, of the aid his skill and knowledge could bring to this shy and secret people. With Nura's warm hand in his, he went up with the other Shadow Folks into the gathering twilight, and he did not again look back.

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DEAN STUDIOS, Dept. 864 211 W. 7th St., Des Moines, Iowa

By

FRANK

OWEN

The Long Still Streets of Evening

BEFORE ringing the doorbell of the great house on the Avenue, Ives Cranston gazed furtively about him. The street was almost deserted although the evening was still young. Gay automobiles hummed past and occasional buses lumbered down toward the Square. Across the street was Central Park like a peaceful green carpet spread out in the throbbing turmoil of the city.

Ives Cranston was fastidiously dressed, not flashily but in perfect taste. He was tall and rather good-looking. Handsome would be too strong a word but he was not unattractive.

Again he gazed furtively up and down the street. Then he shrugged his shoulders. Evidently he had arrived at some sort of a decision, for he rang the bell. It boomed out sonorously through the rooms as though searching for the dwellers hidden beyond those massive walls.

Almost immediately the door was opened by a Chinese servant who was attired in

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

Jewels are like people, no two are alike—no two have the same secrets

Occidental formal evening dress. He bowed low as he bade the visitor to enter.

A suggestion of burning pungent incense made fragrant the great halls.

"I believe the Honorable Chang Kien is expecting me," began Cranston.

"My master is in the library," was the reply.

"Will you acquaint him with the fact that Ives Cranston of Chicago awaits the pleasure of an interview?"

"My master has instructed me to lead you into his presence at once." The man although undoubtedly Chinese spoke as easily and as fluently as though he were native-born.

He led the way down a wide spacious hall, a hall carpeted in velvet and dimly lighted by iridescent yellow-orange lamps. At the end of the hall was a doorway hidden by soft rich curtains. The servant, whose name was Shung Kung, held the draperies aside as Ives Cranston entered. The room in which he now found himself was very long and very wide. At one end was a massive open fireplace, a fireplace so huge that it seemed capable of holding a trunk of an entire tree at one time. There was no fire burning although a great log lay upon the irons ready to be consumed by the flames whenever necessity demanded. The room was cozy and comfortable, there were many books spread about on the tables and also many lamps. Near every chair there was a lamp and near every lamp there were a quantity of books. Scattered about the room were vases filled with flowers, wistaria, roses, carnations and sweet jasmine, whose fragrance hung like a caress on the air.

Chank Kien sat in a great armchair before the fireplace. He rose as Ives Cranston entered. Cranston reflected that he had seldom seen a man so handsome despite his evident Mongolian extraction. His face although it had a yellow-olive cast, was almost white. His lips were well-formed, well-formed also was his aquiline nose but it was his splendid eyes that were his chief attraction. They were dark, as dark as night shadows but they were more brilliant than crystals in sunlight. They were extremely expressive, reflecting his every mood except when he did not wish his thoughts to be known. Then the fires died down in them, as though at the command of his will they had been banked, leaving them sombre and brooding. He was faultlessly attired in a Tuxedo suit. His hands were thin and expressive. On one finger he wore an amethyst which glowed like a purple sunset. In his own country he was a powerful mandarin.

After greetings had been exchanged, Chang Kien motioned his guest to be seated.

"I was just drinking a cup of pearl-orchid scented tea," he said, "perhaps you might care to join me. There is no more charming method of binding friendship than for companions to quaff tea together."

As he spoke he poured out a tiny cupful of the amber fluid.

"Small though the cup is," he mused, "the strength it contains is vast."

Ives Cranston lifted the fragile cup to his lips and sipped the tea. It was odd, slightly sweet in taste but not unpleasant. As Cranston slowly consumed the beverage Chang Kien plunged into a discussion of literature which was distinctly charming. His enunciation was perfect and the tone of his voice was like rare music. He talked of the charm of single words, of groups of words and tiny verses and quoted snatches of songs from old Chinese poets.

The wind blows. The inn is filled with
the scent of willow flowers.

She sits all night by the cold lamp until
the moon melts into the dawn.

The sages and worthies of old times
Have left not a sound,
Only those who drank
Have achieved lasting fame.

So he quoted on and on, bits of verse, broken bits of sentences that aroused pleasurable thoughts within him. At first Ives Cranston was delighted with his drolleries but as the hours passed he commenced to grow uneasy.

Finally, when for a moment his host lapsed into silence, he said abruptly, "I could listen to you endlessly were it not for the fact that I am pressed for time. Literature has always appealed to me, and poetry I have always adored. But I have come all

the way from Chicago to behold the Gobi Diamond which you have advertised for sale throughout the country. Legends about it are cropping up everywhere, even in the wind that blows through the wheatlands."

Chang Kien rose to his feet. He was all apologies. "Forgive me for forgetting your purpose here," he said, "but when my mind is plunged in literature it is as though I walk in a sweet dream. Lovely words are jewels more gorgeous than any precious stone. They enthrall me far more greatly. A stone delights the material eye, gorgeous words appeal to the spiritual."

As he spoke he crossed the room to a wall-safe, a simple affair which is customarily builded into the better-class houses. In a few moments he returned with a red velvet box.

Without a word he drew from it an enormous diamond which he placed upon the table before him where the electric lamps gleamed upon it, causing it to flash and scintillate with a wondrous fire. It was blue-white like moonlight sparkling on a blue lake.

Ives Cranston gasped. He took a step forward. His face was flushed. It seemed hard for him to breathe as though he were suffocated by its magnificence. His hands trembled. They fluttered nervously about the diamond, afraid to touch it, yet caught in the web of its witchery.

"Examine it," suggested Chang Kien, "you can better then judge of its perfection." He was perfectly composed. Once more he seated himself in the great armchair. He sipped languidly at his tea. He paid little attention to the diamond. He thought of the written picture of Ho Shao-Chi:

The single butterfly comes—
Goes—
Comes—
Returning as though urged by love.

The tea in his cup was cold, so he took a fresh cup and filled it from the pot that had been singing softly, kept warm by an alcohol lamp.

And now Ives Cranston held the glowing blue diamond in his hands. He caressed it as though it were alive. He crooned softly to it. The expression of his face was like that of one hypnotized.

Chang Kien gazed at him and smiled. It was foolish to go into such ecstasies over a jewel. Now a perfect quatrain or an unpublished poem by the immortal Li T'ai-Po would be something quite different. But a jewel that contained no music.

He was interrupted in his musings by the voice of Ives Cranston. Chang Kien was a man of moods. His mind was like the sky, ever-changing, ever-charming. But his opinions varied upon occasion. At the moment his mind was filled with wondrous poetry. At other times art and prose held him equally enthralled.

"What is the price of this Jewel?" asked Cranston hoarsely.

"How can one put a price on perfection?" replied Chang Kien quizzically. "In all the world there is no other stone exactly identical to that. Jewels are like people. No two are alike. Pearls, for instance, can be matched as to size and color and fire, but they are not duplicates any more than are two men of similar appearance. I do not say that this is the most marvelous diamond in the world, but such as it is, there is no other to absolutely match it."

IVES CRANSTON seemed surprised. "You adveritsed the gem for sale," he said. "Throughout the length and breadth of the country strange tales and legends are being circulated about it. Its fame could not be greater if you employed a press-agent. Yet now you refuse to set a price upon it."

Chang Kien smiled. "I advertised it in twelve leading cities," he explained. "An art treasure of this sort cannot be disposed of by confining oneself to a single locality. I have had a constant stream of collectors to view it. Some have come all the way from the Pacific Coast."

"If you refuse to put a price upon the diamond," persisted Cranston, "how do you expect to sell it?"

"Merely by bids," was the reply. "If you care you may give the matter thought and mail me a bid. If it is satisfactory I shall reply. If not, the interlude will be over. I sometimes wonder after all whether I would not be disappointed if I succeeded in finding a purchaser."

Long after Cranston had departed, Chang Kien sat alone in the great room upstairs in which he slept. It was a room of austere simplicity, all the draperies were of purple and dark blue. There were a few chairs scattered about, a great bed and an enormous library table well stacked with books. Chang Kien considered that a house only was cozily furnished when there were books in every room. He switched off the electric lights and seated himself in a comfortable armchair. Lazily he lighted a cigarette. It was the hour of the day which he enjoyed most. Each night he sat alone in the darkness before retiring. He liked to review the events of the day. Usually they were worth musing over. His existence had always been rather venturesome and exciting. He loved to study faces. He thought of the people who had recently visited his house to view the diamond. They had come from all walks of life, all sorts and conditions of men and several women, enough material for a hundred dramas. He thought of Gray Anthony and of Ives Cranston. There could be no doubt that they knew each other. At least Cranston knew Anthony, and yet he had denied it. Odd. But then Chang Kien had lived in China, in the Gobi Desert where strange, unbelievable things frequently happen. He had schooled himself to be surprised, to be shocked at nothing. On the other hand he trusted no man. How many friends he had he neither knew nor cared. His sole consideration was the exact number of his enemies. That was a problem worthy of reflection.

How long he remained sitting in the chair he knew not. It was a moment of complete relaxation. He was off guard. He was resting. If the mask slipped from his face what did it matter? All of us wear masks. Expressions never reflect the true man. But they are as necessary as one's clothes to hide one's nakedness.

He had been dozing but now he was fully awake in an instant. He always slept like a soldier prepared for battle. The thing that aroused him was a feeling that someone was moving about downstairs. He did not know whether he had actually heard a sound. Nor did he care. He had a sort of sixth sense that warned him of danger. Perhaps it was purely natural, since many years of his life had been spent in desert places. He knew that his faithful valet, Shung Kung had retired. They had come upstairs together. Shung Kung was more than a servant. He was a trusted companion, a friend. His faithfulness had been tested time and time again. He was the partner in all his master's numerous enterprises.

Chang Kien listened, every nerve tense. There was scarcely any sound but still he knew that someone had stealthily entered the house. Slowly, cautiously he rose to his feet. He was no longer smoking. His cigarette had long since been consumed. And he was glad. The faint aroma on the air might be perceptible to a keen sense even above the pungent fragrance of the incense.

Fortunately the door of his room was still open, so there was no danger of its creaking. He slipped off his slippers. Barefooted he crept stealthily out into the hall. He was unarmed, nor did he make any attempt to secure a weapon. Step by step he crept down the stairs. They were carpeted in rich velvet, heavily padded. Even had he worn shoes his footfalls could not have been heard. At last he arrived at the library door and peered eagerly within, taking every precaution not to be seen. Before the wall safe was Ives Cranston. He had opened the safe and was just drawing the diamond from it as Chang Kien beheld him. He carried no light for the moon was at the full. It flooded the room in a soft, silvery radiance, at least that part of the room that held the wall-safe. It was as though the very perfection of the night had decided to help in the robbery. Chang Kien watched Cranston only for a second. Then he made his way slowly back upstairs to his room. There he found Shung Kung awaiting him. Shung whispered to him softly as he entered. In a few brief words his master informed him of what he had perceived.

"Subterfuge," he murmured, "is a terrible thing." Thus speaking, he sighed and lay down upon the bed.

Meanwhile Ives Cranston had secured the diamond. He left through the open window by which he had entered. He had found it unlatched when he arrived, so it was not necessary to try to pick the door-lock. He was jubilant. The gorgeous Gobi Diamond was his at last. It was worth coming from

Pittsburgh to secure. Of course, he had said that he was from Chicago. It would never do in an affair of this sort to give one's real home town.

A few moments later he was on the street again. For safety's sake he decided to cut through Central Park. Perhaps he could find a taxi. He had hoped to have a taxi waiting for him. But at the last minute he had decided that to do so would be too risky. As a rule he worked alone. No one had anything on him. In Pittsburgh he was known as a wealthy stockbroker. He was well-respected well-liked. His friends were numerous. They imagined he was extremely rich and he was. After all is not a clever mind far greater in value than mere money? A taxi was ambling past. He hailed it. It was fortunate that it was empty. He directed the chauffeur to drive him to the Pennsylvania Depot. He had decided to take the first train out of town no matter where it went. The main thing now was to get away. After that he would hurry to Pittsburgh as quickly as possible. Thus musing, he stepped into the taxi. To his consternation he discovered that it was not vacant. He had made a frightful mistake. On this one night of all nights when he wished to avoid meeting anyone he had blundered into a situation which necessitated quick thinking. The occupant of the cab was an old man, a rather tiny old man with bushy white hair. Most of the time only his white hair was visible but whenever they passed a street lamp his jovial face loomed into view.

"Pardon me," spluttered Ives Cranston. "I thought this taxi was empty."

The old man laughed heartily. "It practically is," he chuckled, "for I am as good as nobody. A garrulous old man whom no one takes seriously." He seized the arm of Cranston. "You must stay," he went on quickly. His voice was decisive. "After midnight all men are brothers, whether they be kings or thieves. At that time the long still streets of evening take on a hush of magic. All honest folks are sleeping. Only millionaires, beggars and milkmen are prowling about. Where do you wish to go? I'll take you anywhere you say? If you wish I will join you on a night's adventure. I am cursed with insomnia. For years it has clutched at my health. But now I have mastered it. The secret of overcoming insomnia is never to go to bed."

Ives Cranston sat in his corner. He was very dejected. How was he to rid himself of this garrulous old gentleman? He was probably mildly mad but harmless. At another time he would have been amused by the old man's prattle but not while he carried the wondrous Gobi Diamond in his pocket. Not even Scheherazade herself could have interested him at that moment.

He was in a quandary but abruptly he decided that he would be affable. The old man was harmless. To insist on getting out of the taxi might create a scene. He was unable to gauge the exact degree of the old man's mania.

"I wish to go to the Pennsylvania Depot," he said. "If you insist on going out of your way to accommodate me, you may do so."

The old man called through the speaking-tube to the chauffeur. He had hard work making himself understood.

"I guess," he drawled, "you can't get a license to be a chauffeur unless you are slightly deaf. Anyway they all seem to be."

He drew a couple of cigars from his pocket. "Smoke?" he asked laconically. "These are excellent. A friend sent me them from Tampa. They are the only things from Florida that aren't over-rated."

Mechanically Ives Cranston took the proffered cigar. As he lighted it, he admitted that its excellence could not be denied. Never had he smoked a cigar that was more pungent to the taste. After all the evening's work was not ending in failure. Perhaps this was even a better way to get to the station than that which he had planned. The little old gentleman sitting beside him, like an old jovial grandfather, was the very best sort of a companion to direct suspicion from him. He drew on his cigar. It was surprising how rapidly it was burning away. Within the cab it was delightfully comfortable. The chauffeur was driving rather slowly as though he were drowsy. Cranston yawned. He was drowsy too. Time after time he yawned and once he actually dozed. For a moment he forgot where he was. This would never do. A fortune depended on his keeping awake. Yet the drowsiness persisted. His eyes kept closing as though there were leaden weights on

the lids. A delightful feeling of contentment crept over him. If only he could sleep. Sweet dreams beckoned. More than anything else in the world he desired sleep, that is more than anything but the Gobi Diamond. Surreptitiously he felt in his inner pocket to see if the diamond were still there. He sighed with relief as his hand encountered it. Now he could sleep, now he could rest. Even his memory was breaking away from its moorings like a launch in a typhoon. He forgot everything, forgot his predicament, forgot the necessity to escape, forgot Chang Kien, yes, even the diamond itself. Tranquil sleep stole over him. The curtain of unconsciousness softly descended. The last thing he was conscious of was the calm even voice of the old man. "In the long still streets of evening anything and everything may happen."

When Ives Cranston awakened he was lying in a soft bed in an attractive room. The sun streamed in through a stained glass window. The room was not elaborately furnished but it was wonderfully restful. So quiet and peaceful it was, it urged one to slumber. He drew his hand across his eyes, striving to collect his memory. He felt remarkably well but all the happenings of the night preceding seemed like a dream. Suddenly he thought of the Gobi Diamond. He sprang from the bed. He was extremely nervous as he took his coat from a chair and felt in the inside pocket. After that he breathed easier. He still had the diamond. He had no inkling as to where he was, nor how he had gotten there. Although the room was serene he realized that his position was precarious to the extreme. Nevertheless, he was able to think clearly.

He walked into the adjoining bathroom and washed and brushed his hair. Then very deliberately he completed dressing. He was in no hurry. In fact, he rather hesitated to open the door that led from the room. What lay behind it? It was a hard question. Even after he had finished dressing, he was loathe to leave. He sat down on a couch. The climax of this particular adventure was upon him.

Even as he thus reflected, the door opened slowly. He gazed at it ominously until it had opened wide. Then a man appeared upon the threshold. He advanced into the room all smiles. But Cranston did not smile. His tongue and lips grew dry, for the figure that approached was that of Chang Kien.

"I came quietly," he said, "so that I would not disturb you if you were still sleeping. He who arouses a guest is more of a scoundrel than he who destroys a wondrous symphony. You must be hungry. I will order your breakfast to be served right here."

He walked across the room and pressed a button in the wall. A few minutes later Shung Kung appeared carrying a tray. On the tray were toast, a plate of cold chicken and a pot of coffee.

"For my own breakfast," mused Chang Kien, "I always take tea but I am aware that in this country coffee is given preference. Eat and may you enjoy your breakfast. While you do so I will read a bit."

As he spoke he drew a slender volume from his pocket.

"This little book," he continued, "is a history of the haikai form of poetry. It is Japanese and although I prefer the poems of China, still I like to read the poetry of other countries for comparative purposes. Chinese poetry is the oldest in the world. It has mellowed like old wine with age. Japanese poetry is mostly imitative. Its roots are buried in old China. Still there are gems in the literature of Japan which are superb in their loveliness. What could be more exquisite than:

"Thought I, the fallen flowers
Are returning to their branch;
But lo! they were butterflies."

I think of all Japanese poems I like best the haikais of Matsuro Basho:

"I come weary,
In search of an inn—
Ah! these wistaria flowers."

One would have to journey long to find aught that exceeds them in perfection."

Although Ives Cranston had no appetite, he ate mechanically. He felt as though an unseen net was tightening about him. Chang Kien could not have been more cordial, but it was unnatural. Under the circumstances

he would have preferred him to show extreme anger.

At last he finished eating. The last drop of coffee had been consumed. He put down his cup and gazed questioningly at the face of Chang Kien. But Chang was unperturbed. He continued reading:

"Between the hedges of two gardens
Floating, swaying, floating,
A willow."

Ives Cranston could stand the silence no longer.

"Would I be presuming," he asked coldly, "if I asked how I came to be here?"

Chang Kien laid aside his book. He smiled. "As to that," he said, "would I be presuming if I asked how the Gobi Diamond came to be in the inner pocket of your coat? We will answer questions in chronological order. Since the diamond disappeared prior to your entrance into the room, I do not think I am at fault in requesting some slight explanation."

Ives Cranston seemed confused. What answer could he give? It was bold-faced robbery and he had been caught. There was nothing to say and so he said nothing.

"You are guilty of sundry crimes," mused Chang Kien. "To enter unlawfully the home of a man with whom you have shaken hands in friendship is a grievous thing."

"What are you going to do?" asked Cranston defiantly.

"I scarcely know," replied Chang Kien. "Shall I ring for more coffee or perhaps you would prefer a cigarette? It has always seemed to me that the world would progress if wars could be fought in gentlemanly fashion."

"I want nothing," snapped Cranston.

"That is the strangest request I have ever had made to me," drawled Chang Kien. "Usually my acquaintances desire all sorts of favors and expensive extravagances. I have often thought that a man must indeed be fortunate to be able to afford many friends. Personally I prefer enemies. They are less expensive and far more interesting and diverting. So much for preliminaries. Now as to the matter in hand. There are several roads down which I might proceed. You will perhaps pardon my bluntness but you have robbed my house. You have taken from me a rare possession—the Gobi Diamond. Besides which you have given one more jolt to my faith in human nature. I could have you arrested."

"Nothing of the sort," declared Cranston. "While it is true I am here in this room you cannot prove that I have robbed you of anything. What proof is there that I took the Gobi Diamond? It would be your word against mine. I am a citizen, a respected member of society."

"Being a member of society can scarcely be taken as a recommendation," said Chang Kien. "As to proof, I saw you take the diamond from the safe. So did the faithful, honest Shung Kung. The little old man with whom you rode about the city last evening is a famous and shrewd detective. He brought you to this house. He saw the Gobi Diamond in your pocket. He knew that it belonged to me, for it was not the first time he had seen it. I assure you I am violating no trust when I say that the old gentleman was employed to guard the diamond. Who shall find fault with him simply because his methods of working are slightly different to the established? I do not wish to spoil your day. The sun is far too beautiful, the air too fresh. There is poetry in the air. This morning I do believe a lark was singing in my garden. Yet it seems to me the evidence against you is very strong. I have no doubt that you are well thought of in Pittsburgh."

"Who said I came from Pittsburgh?" snapped Cranston.

"Pardon me if I presume," was the reply. "I know you stated you were from Chicago. However a gentleman from Chicago as a rule does not have his clothes made in Pittsburgh. Your hat too has a Pittsburgh label. However it is of no consequence. It would be quite possible, I imagine, for a man to be a gentleman in either city. In my own country, I am respected. I trust I show no conceit when I state that my fame has spread throughout the Gobi Desert. In my own country I am a magistrate. Countless are the trials at which I have officiated. I rather pride myself on my fairness. Justice to me is a divine thing. I am rather vain and for that reason I believe I will settle the present

case to my own liking. You have caused me much worry. You have made me lose an entire night's sleep. This rest is lost. I shall never be able to reclaim it. If you have any suggestions to make I will listen to them. But bear this in mind. You will not escape until the scales of justice have swung into balance. The law must take its course."

Ives Cranston could not help admiring the suave manner of Chang Kien. He knew that he had met defeat. He also realized that if this affair ever became known he would lose all the prestige which for years he had labored so carefully to build up.

"Let us say," he suggested, "that for last night I simply rented the diamond. For its use I am willing to pay. What do you think about a thousand dollars?"

"Not much," said Chang Kien curtly. "This is an affair which I detest being mixed up in. To a great degree I feel that it is beneath me. You cannot bargain with me. My price is ten thousand dollars. Nothing less. And permit me to say, all things considered, you are getting off rather cheaply."

Ives Cranston gasped. "I have not that amount of money with me."

'I am sure of that," was the reply, "but I think under the circumstances I will permit you to leave the house to get it. You have an account in a New York bank not far from this house. If you take a taxi it will not take you long. I do not think that you will endeavor to get away. You would not in any case. Even at this moment, a taxi is waiting for you at the door."

As Chang Kien spoke he led the way downstairs.

"I will wait for you in the library," he said. "I shall read a bit more of Matsura Basho while I do so."

After Cranston had gone Chang Kien settled down in a great armchair. He would liked to have seen Cranston's face when he found the jovial old friend of the past evening waiting to share once more his taxi with him.

In less than half an hour Cranston was back again. Now his expression was as calm and serene as that of Chang Kien. He too was able to control his emotions. He was a born gambler, a good loser. He bowed down before genius that was greater than his own. He counted out the money.

"It is all there," he said slowly. "And now since our business is over I suppose you have no objection to my leaving."

"None whatsoever," smiled Chang Kien. "Whenever you are in New York I should be charmed to have you visit me."

Cranston was anxious to get away. He still had the Gobi Diamond. In the confusion Chang Kien seemed to have forgotten it. As he walked toward the door, Chang Kien called after him.

"One moment," he said. "You may keep the Gobi Diamond. It is only paste. The one you viewed last evening was real but always before retiring I remove it from the wall safe and place therein a rather splendid imitation. The chance of being robbed, you see, entered into my calculations."

Long after Ives Cranston had gone Chang Kien still sat in his library reading his slender volume of haikais by Matsura Basho who of all the Japanese poets is the most interesting.

"The evening's cold
Touches the pallid lily's skin
Before it touches me."

Not till he had read the last verses did he lay the book aside. Even then he did so reluctantly. Now his mind was free, free to muse over the happenings of the last few hours. The interlude had been amusing and also lucrative. He admired the excellent manner in which Ives Cranston had accepted defeat. He was quite honorable enough to be a member of polite society

The Seven Seas Are One

By ALLISON V. HARDING

DR. JOHN OGILBY opened his front door in answer to the insistent ringing. Outside stood an aged, agitated little woman.

"Why Mrs. Ives," said the doctor in surprise. "It's rather late to see you abroad."

"It's the Captain, Doctor," fluttered the woman wringing her hands. "Please come with me. He's not right again."

"What do you mean 'not right'?"

"He's talking queer, Doctor, and he's sitting up in his room with a loaded pistol on his lap rolling his eyes and carrying on to scare the saints. I get so worried!" The little old woman looked as though she was about to burst into tears.

"Sometimes I tell myself I should stop housekeeping, but Captain Tyler needs me. At any rate, he needs somebody." Her hands waved helplessly in accompaniment to the oft-repeated tale.

Dr. Ogilby put on his hat and coat and went out the door with her.

"Of course you walked, Mrs. Ives?"

"Nary a person would stop to give me a lift, Doctor."

"Well, we'll take my car to go back out. It's getting dark and a two-mile walk would keep us away from him just that much longer. How is his rheumatism, Mrs. Ives?"

Her brow puckered as she followed him into his little coupé.

"Praise us, that is the least of my worries with all this queer talking he's doing."

As they started off down a back road of little Clarksville, the small New England town was even then, at nine o'clock, readying itself for the night.

The yellow glow from the headlights probed forward along the desolate lane that led to Captain Tyler's. Mrs. Ives was silent now, fatigued by her walk into town. Dr. Ogilby sorted over in his mind what he knew about the old seafarer. What he knew

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

Distance and time are nothing to a dead man with his death to revenge!

indeed! It was next to nothing. Precious little!

TYLER was an old sailor. He had been master of his own ship and lived two miles outside town in a little house, the rent for which was covered by his monthly retirement stipend. Mrs. Ives, a reliable character of the town who, with her kin, had made serving others their profession, kept the old sailor's home for him, cleaning and getting an occasional meal. Dr. Ogilby was necessary because of the attacks of rheumatism that the Captain was liable to develop at any time.

Dr. Ogilby remembered the first time he had seen Tyler. He was impressed with the bigness of the man, the frank brutality of his weatherbeaten face.

"I get these pains, Doc," roared the old ship's master. "My legs and my back. They get hurting something awful. You'll fix me up, eh?"

And Dr. Ogilby said he'd be glad to do his best. He noted at the first examination that physically the Captain was as strong as an ox.

Dr. Ogilby pulled the nose of his little car into the driveway and braked to a stop. With Mrs. Ives bustling along ahead, the physician stepped into the house.

"He's upstairs," said the housekeeper.

Dr. Ogilby nodded silently and started up the flight leading to the top floor. There was a roar from above.

"Avast there, you seacook, I hear you coming!"

Mrs. Ives trotted up the steps back of the doctor.

"You see, that's what he was doing all afternoon. He seems to think somebody's after him."

Ogilby reached the top of the stairs. The old seamaster's room was directly before him, the door to it open.

Seated in an ancient rocker just inside was Captain Tyler, his clothes disarranged, a mad light in his eyes, and a derringer lying on his knee. As the physician stepped toward him, the seafarer made a move to reach for his gun. His hand closed excitedly over the stock of his weapon and he exploded some curses.

"It's only me, Captain Tyler," hurried the doctor. "You're not feeling well I see. I want to help you. Now tell me what's the matter."

The old man broke at that and his hands fell slackly at his sides.

Dr. Ogilby tactfully removed the small derringer and placed it on the bureau. He noted that Tyler's face was white and bore signs of strain.

"Come now, get yourself over here and I'll examine you."

Tyler hobbled over to the bed and stretched out, muttering all the while to himself.

"It's good you came, Doctor," he gasped. "It's good you came. There's been a bad wind blowing around here lately. Mean's trouble. I can feel it, ye know. I think he's coming. That's what I been saying to myself all day. I been saying to myself, 'Captain watch out. . . . He'll be back soon now'."

"Who's *he?*" asked the doctor curiously. But Tyler's answer was an unintelligible muttering punctuated by some more oaths.

AFTER satisfying himself that there was nothing of a physical nature wrong with Tyler, Dr. Ogilby urged a strong sedative on the old man and went softly out of the room. Mrs. Ives was waiting impatiently downstairs.

"What do you make out of all this, Doctor?" she said eagerly.

"Well, he seems very upset about something. He doesn't complain about his rheumatism though, and I find nothing else wrong with him. I think he'll sleep it off. Nothing unusual's happened lately, has it?"

"No," said the housekeeper thoughtfully, "except—"

"Except what?" said the doctor.

"Oh, I don't think there's any connection, but he has two closets up in his room. One, he keeps locked all the time. I was cleaning in his room yesterday and I tried the locked door absent-mindedly. He was sitting in the room and he started to curse. Well, you know how he goes on. After I went downstairs, he locked the door to his room and I couldn't help hearing that he went to the closet and opened it. He's done this before and it always seems to upset him. I hear him grumbling and cursing and talking as if actually to somebody."

"He probably keeps a bit of rum in there,"

said Ogilby wryly, "although I must admit there's no trace tonight that he's been drinking. You don't usually stay here all night, do you Mrs. Ives?"

The elderly woman shook her head.

"I think if you could though, it would be better. He should sleep right through until tomorrow and I have every anticipation that he'll be all right when he wakes up, but a man of his age shouldn't be completely alone when he's so upset—no matter what the cause. I wouldn't mind telling him that I suggested you stay and I'm sure he'd pay you for your time."

"Oh, it isn't that at all, Doctor," said Mrs. Ives hastily. "I don't mind when a poor soul is sick, but it's kind of lonely out here and his strange talk today made me feel sort of creepy. There's so much darkness around this little cottage. It's lonely. There's woods all around us except the side where the sea comes in. Oh, I've been here a few nights, you know. One time, you remember, when he was very bad with rheumatism."

The doctor nodded.

"He's not a very sociable old codger, I guess."

"All there is is the sound of the sea and the wind." Mrs. Ives shuddered. "Still if you think I ought. . . ."

"I do," said Dr. Ogilby. "And if you can, I'd feel better about it."

He took two white pellets out of his bag.

"If he wakes up in the night and you hear him, give him these." The doctor closed his black bag with a snap and headed toward the car.

"I'll drop by sometime tomorrow, Mrs. Ives."

Then he was gone and the sound of his car finally receded into the distance, leaving only sighing wind and the sound of the nearby sea lapping at the sun-baked summer earth.

Mrs. Ives made very sure of the windows and doors of the cottage before she lay down on the couch. Almost laughing at herself, she took the heavy poker from the fireplace and placed it on a chair at her side. Then with the light off, she tried to relax, staring up at the ceiling and wondering about the old man upstairs who had kept insisting that "he" was coming. The housekeeper thought with a chill that "he" was probably not very nice, else why would an unimaginative and resourceful man like Shipmaster Tyler wait for him with a loaded pistol and a white, haunted face?

THE next day when Dr. Ogilby called, Captain Tyler was his old gruff, blustering self with seemingly no remembrance of the preceding day. He was hardly civil to Ogilby, and before the physician could say much, the Captain had headed off down toward the shore. Mrs. Ives reported nothing unusual and Ogilby went away thinking that all was well.

But it was only a week later when Ogilby received another hurry call to come out to the Tyler cottage on the seacoast. This time a messenger brought word, Mrs. Ives not wanting to leave the old man.

When the physician arrived, he found the housekeeper highly perturbed downstairs.

"He's fired that gun off," she expostulated. "Gracious, but I think he's right out of his head."

"'Long as you're all right, Mrs. Ives," said the doctor hurrying up the stairs.

This time the door to Tyler's room was shut—and locked, the doctor soon found out. He rapped sharply on the panel and a hoarse guttural sound came from within.

"Captain Tyler, it's Dr. Ogilby!"

There was a curse and the sound of some furniture knocked over.

"Go away," roared the old sailor.

"Now, now, Captain," soothed Ogilby from outside. "Please let me in. I'm sorry you're ill. I want to help you."

Finally there was the sound of the lock and Captain Tyler flung the door open. As the panel slid aside, Ogilby found himself facing a pistol.

"Put that thing down, man."

Tyler still retained enough of his senses to recognize the doctor and allowed the pistol to be taken from his hand. Even so, Captain Tyler stepped to the door and called downstairs to Mrs. Ives.

"Ahoy below there! Keep a sharp eye out for strangers. Keep things battened down!"

With that he closed the door, locked it, and turned to Ogilby almost pathetically.

"Didn't see nobody around when you came, did you, Doc?"

The physician shook his head.

"But why, Captain? Tell me what's it all

about. Do you have reason to believe somebody wants to make trouble for you?"

The old sailor smiled at that.

"Trouble you say, Doc? Well now, I wouldn't say quite trouble. He means to kill me."

"What!" said Dr. Ogilby, shocked. "Who is this person? And why do you think he's after you?"

With that the bulky figure turned away. "Reckon it's nobody's business but mine."

"But Captain, is it one of the people in Clarksville?"

But Tyler shrugged and would say no more.

"Think he's a mite touched, Doctor?" said Mrs. Ives later downstairs.

Ogilby frowned. "It's hard to pass judgment on a thing like that. He acts perfectly normal most of the time?"

"Oh, he treats me fine," answered Mrs. Ives hastily. "Pays me well, he does. Treats me kind. Short and irritable sometimes, you understand. But he's a reasonable gentleman, I always say. Of course he swears, but menfolks do that, especially sailors."

"He's got no people, has he?" mused the physician.

"Not so far as I've been able to find out," replied the housekeeper definitely.

"Well," the medical man concluded, "at least his rheumatism isn't bothering him much these days. By the way, you haven't been able to find out who this person is he thinks wants to harm him?"

"No," said Mrs. Ives. Then as an afterthought, "Maybe he's possessed."

Ogilby smiled. "Well, Mrs. Ives, if the Captain needs me, just get in touch any time."

THE Captain needed Dr. Ogilby just three days later.

"He's dead!" screamed Mrs. Ives over a neighbor's telephone to the physician. "He drowned himself out there on the shore. Lord 'a mercy, we never would've found him if it hadn't been for the neighbor's boy. Least I think he's dead." Pause. "Oh, Doctor, hurrry, hurry! They say he's got some warmth in him yet."

Ogilby raced out in his car and found Captain Tyler an unconscious cold white form. His heart was still beating though, and the old sailor's iron constitution was staving off the effects of his near drowning.

After getting him in bed and giving the proper medications, Ogilby went downstairs where a tall gangling lad of about seventeen was waiting with Mrs. Ives.

"How is he, Doctor?" said the housekeeper.

"Oh, he'll be all right," said Ogilby. "He's got tremendous strength, you know. How did this business happen?"

Mrs. Ives spread her arms wide. "It was Harley here who found him."

The medical man turned to the young lad. "What happened?"

The boy was still upset by his experience and his words came haltingly.

"You see . . . I was walking down by the coast. I got some lines set off shore and I was checking them when I came up to the little beach on the Captain's property and I saw him walking along waving his hands and talking as though somebody else were there with him. Naturally I watched. He started walking away from the water toward his cottage . . . then all of a sudden his hands come out like somebody was about to wrestle or fight. Honest, it looked as though he was about to fight with somebody. And then he goes staggering down the beach like he was drunk or somebody's pushed him, and in a twink he's in the water up to his shoulders, clothes and all.

"Then I see him go under, only he doesn't come up again. Naturally I don't like to interefere in the beginning, but when I see this, I think he's in some trouble so I run as fast as I can out there and go in after him and pull him up on the beach. He weren't in very long, but long enough to get a lot of water into him and it's coming out of his mouth and nose. He was unconscious so I yelled and finally Mrs. Ives heard me and came down. She took one look and said, 'He's dead' and I got thinking first maybe he was. He looked so cold and so white. But I did like we were taught in the Scouts."

The boy made pushing movements with his two hands.

"'Course at first even if you think the guy's dead, you should work on him."

Dr. Ogilby nodded in approval and slapped the boy on the shoulder.

"Between us, we dragged him up to the house and then Mrs. Ives ran over to my place and called you. Then he got to

breathing a bit on his own. I'm glad he's all right."

"You did fine, Harley," commended the doctor.

The boy enjoyed the praise but then looked worried. "There was something awful funny about the way he carried on, though."

Mrs. Ives frowned.

"When you're the Captain's age, maybe you'll take a couple of drinks sometimes. Better be running along home, Harley. I'm going to tell your mother what a good smart lad you are."

The boy winked and grinningly departed.

"I don't want it getting around that the Captain's a crazy man," said the housekeeper indignantly, "if only for my sake. I don't want anybody to think I work for somebody possessed by demons."

"I'm going to go up and have another talk with him," said the physician. "I think we've got to find out what's preying on his mind."

Mrs. Ives shrugged. "Sometimes it's a mistake to look into these things too closely, Doctor. If there's strange forces at work, if the Captain hears and sees things that we don't, that's the Almighty's work and we don't want to butt our way into it."

"I'll be very careful, Mrs. Ives, you may be sure," reassured the medical man heading upstairs.

CAPTAIN TYLER'S eyes followed Dr. Ogilby across the room from door to bedside. Drawing up a chair close by, the physician seated himself, reached over and patted one of the sailor's huge hairy paws. Some color had come back into his patient's face but the man's eyes were feverish and troubled.

"Just what happened to you, Captain?" said Ogilby.

The ex-seafarer bared his teeth in a ghoulish grin.

"Aye, and don't you know it's him, Doc? I knew he'd come back and he's here. He almost got me today too, didn't he?"

"Now, man, you've got to stop this talk about 'him.' Who is he? If somebody's bothering you, let us know. There are laws against that sort of thing."

"No laws, Doctor," the old man wagged his head.

Ogilby shook his head impatiently. "If you don't care to tell me—" he started.

The Captain rolled eyes dilated with fear toward him.

"Sure I'll tell you, Doc. A tale that'll make your hair stand on end, and it's true, bless me, every word of it."

Ogilby laid a soothing hand against his patient's shoulder.

"Now, take it easy, Tyler," he said. "You went through an ordeal this afternoon. Maybe this isn't the time."

"Maybe it is!" roared the old man and he cursed vehemently for a few minutes, "then you can see the sort of weather I'm headed into."

Ogilby saw that it would upset his patient more to oppose him than to let him get the yarn off his chest. Anyway, he felt a natural curiosity.

"All right, let's have it."

The ex-skipper dug his elbows into the bed and hitched himself a notch higher.

"It was on my last trip, Doc. We were coming back from South America with a mixed cargo. My ship was poorly manned that trip and I had a bad one for my first mate. He didn't like me and I didn't like him from the first day we sighted each other in Savannah Harbor . . . that's when he joined up with me.

"Well, you don't always like the men that serve under you and they don't always like you, but this time it was more than that. I think the fates meant us to hate each other, sort of a foreshadow of what was going to happen.

"At Montevideo we picked up a few passengers, six of them were women. All went well until we were about three-quarters of the way up the South American coast when one of the worst storms I've ever seen in that part of the world blew up. Still I would have bet on the old *Betsy Mae*, that was her name, riding out almost anything, when we had to go and drop a screw. Then the first mate went crazy and without orders from me, turned the *Betsy Mae* toward where the coastline was fifty or sixty miles away. Before I could countermand his orders, we had taken the full weight of the sea across our beam and the *Betsy Mae* sprang a dozen leaks all at once.

"Even as I cursed the mate and set the helmsman right, I knew from the way the

old girl rode now that she was doomed." Captain Tyler wrung his giant hands together as though he were still standing on the bridge that fateful night.

"I had Sparks send out distress signals but we found there was no ship within six hours of us. I knew that in that heavy sea we stood only a slim chance in open boats and rafts, but the mate on his own hook began to ready the lifeboats.

"I saw red then and I almost shot him for insubordination. I could have, too. I warned him to wait until he got his orders from me. By this time, the *Betsy Mae* had a list of at least forty-five degrees and the pumps were fighting a losing battle against the water pouring into her hold.

"Finally, I knew if we waited much longer, we'd be carried down with the vessel, so I had the lifeboats that hadn't been wrecked by the storm lowered and rafts thrown into the sea. Very few of us made it, but I jumped in and found my way to a small raft capable of holding five or six people. Somehow, several of the women were clustered aboard this raft.

"I WAS able to pick another of the women out of the water although we hardly had space for her. Every now and then we would be completely covered up as waves and spray poured over us. So overcrowded we seemed on the verge of turning over into that boiling sea at any moment.

"Suddenly I felt our raft dip dangerously and several of the women screamed. I looked down and saw a pair of hands clutching the side of the boat. One of the women started to moan. The others were crying. It seemed any moment our raft would turn over and all of us plunged into the sea. The swimmer, whoever he was, was trying to hoist himself onto the raft and we could all see he would upset it. I knew the other occupants could never have lasted in that sea again more than a few minutes.

"Then I saw who he was. It was the mate there in the water snarling and gripping our raft and raising himself up on it. I yelled at him over the sound of the storm and he screamed back at me. And then instinctively I hit him. I smashed at his hands on the side of the raft. It was either him or all of us. I knew it and the other people on the raft knew it.

"Then he got a fist grip on the front of my jacket. I cursed the strength of that master's coat I had always been so proud of, cursed as he held on, his fingers hooked around a button and some of the cloth. One of the women, with frenzied strength, helped me wrench his one hand loose from the side, but it was I who struck him on the head with all my strength. His weight slumped back in the water almost pulling me overboard. Then there was a wrench and a ripping of cloth and I was free. The mate's other hand had torn loose from my jacket and he went under. He sank right straight down slowly. Straight as a statue he went as though there were a weight tied to his feet.

"But all the time his eyes were open and he stared at me. From under the water he did, I tell you, and even after the rest of his body had gone out of sight, I could see his eyes burning up at me out of the water, his two eyes looking up at me and I knew what he was saying. I knew he was swearing revenge. I don't know how long I kept seeing his eyes way down there burning up through the water. But I swear I did for hours.

"Finally the sea calmed and light showed in the east. Not long afterward, we were picked up. Everybody on the raft was very grateful to me and not one ever said anything about the mate. They all knew it was him or all of us. But I kinda knew he meant to follow me wherever I went." Captain Tyler shrugged in his bed.

"That was my last trip. It's hard for a sailor to lose his ship on the last trip like that, but my record had always been very good and I was over the age limit. So I came here. A landlubber finally but as close to the sea as I could get. I'd die without the sea, Doc." Tyler looked at Ogilby intently. "There, that's the tale."

Ogilby hummed and then reasoned: "But surely you don't really believe that a dead man can come thousands of miles up here to get revenge. I can see that you have that adventure clearly in your mind and that naturally you feel remorseful about it. Still, as you've described it to me, you could have done nothing else that night. Come now, man, you can't go on brooding about it. The experience, horrible as it was, can't affect you now."

At that Captain Tyler flew into a rage. "Why you idiot! I saw him, I tell you! I saw him sink right before me. His eyes were looking at me as he went down. He was dead but he was still looking at me, his eyes shining up out of the water. He was talking to me, he was, and I understood what he said."

Dr. Ogilby shook out some white tablets onto the bedtable.

"Now, Captain," he soothed. "You're going to be all right. If you feel restless, just take one of these. I'm going to ask Mrs. Ives to stay in the house with you a few nights, and if you need me, you can get her to go over to the neighbor's and phone. I'm sure you're going to be all right again. You realize how much better your rheumatism's been lately," the physician added brightly.

"Damn the rheumatism, man. I've got me something real to worry about this time."

Ogilby started toward the door.

"You'll see!" roared the Captain. "But I'm aiming to fight."

"What can you fight, Captain?" said Ogilby pausing, his hand on the knob.

CAPTAIN TYLER shook his shaggy head and worry pushed his face into a grimace. "I don't know," he said. "I guess I brought it on myself and there's not much I can do. I know he's here. When I first bunked into this place, I thought it could be he wouldn't find me. But then one day I got the feeling. Doc, I got the feeling that he was here. I get it from the sea, you understand. It doesn't make any difference that this place is thousands of miles away from where the *Betsy Mae* went down. What's that to a dead man?" and Captain Tyler threw back his head and laughed.

"You take a couple of those pills," called Dr. Ogilby as he pulled open the door.

"All right, my hearty," said Tyler.

Downstairs, the physician spoke to Mrs. Ives.

"He's very upset. This thing has been a great shock to him."

"Did you find out anything more about this person he thinks is after him?" said the curious old woman.

"He's not very clear about all that," evaded the doctor.

"But he sure believes it awful hard," countered Mrs. Ives. "Let's see, it was the hardware man's son who was kind of crazy here a few years ago. He used to go around with a shotgun. Never did anything bad but sure scared a lot of folks out of their wits. Them folks are hard to comprehend."

Ogilby dismissed this with a wave of his hand.

"It's not like that, Mrs. Ives. Captain Tyler has been through a lot of experiences at sea that make him, well, perhaps a little different from us, and then his accident today would be upsetting to anybody. You do the best you can and I'll come back in a day or so."

Typically, Captain Tyler was his old self again within twenty-four hours, holding off any and all questions regarding the previous episode.

Mrs. Ives reported to Dr. Ogilby, however, that the sailor spent much more time down at the seashore looking out at the ocean.

"Kind of as though 'he's waiting for something,'" she said . . . "or somebody!"

"He's a sailor," replied the medical man. "It follows that he's fond of water. Too bad they take a man like that off a boat and tie him up to the shore. Still there's a nice pension," he added as an afterthought.

The next few weeks of warm summer weather passed quickly, when one night at his office door, Ogilby was called upon by Captain Tyler himself. The old man was greatly petturbed. He had thinned a bit and his face was drawn and shadowed.

"Dr. Ogilby," he started hesitantly after the greetings. "I've got to get out of Clarksville right away. You're the only person I know here excepting Mrs. Ives. I wondered if you could help me to get rid of my little berth."

There was such pleading in the old man's eyes that the doctor at once offered to do all he could to help him dispose of the house.

"What's brought you to this decision though, Captain? I thought you liked our country."

"Well, I do and I don't," said Tyler. "Anyway, I thought I'd go some place else and as quick as possible'."

Dr. Ogilby decided to speak what was in his mind. "Is it because of that fellow you think is after you?"

FEAR crowded across the old sailor's face.

"Guess it is," he answered in a low voice studying his hands. "Don't mind speaking up to you that I'm scared, Doc. I lie there at night listening to the sea and I hear him outside splashing around waiting for me, and then I get so I think I see those eyes looking right through the wall at me. He thinks he's got me now. Maybe I did wrong that time years ago, but I can't stand having him haunting me this way."

Ogilby put a sympathetic arm around his patient.

"I'll do all I can to help you," said the physician.

"When do you think we could get this settled?" Tyler pushed.

"Well, of course it does take some time."

"If I could go away quick. . . . "

"A few days at the least it'll take."

"Do the best you can, Doctor," said the old seafarer.

The next day Ogilby made several inquiries around town. It pleased him to find that it probably would be possible to take over Captain Tyler's little cottage within a reasonably short time. Full of this news and at the end of his calls early, he decided to head his coupé out toward the skipper's home. Reaching there, he alighted and walked into the house. Mrs. Ives was baking biscuits in the kitchen and didn't know where the Captain was.

"He's probably out taking one of his walks," she said. "Most likely you'll find him down near the water."

Dr. Ogilby thanked her and headed outside. He picked his way carefully along a well-defined trail that ran through some pine trees toward the beach. Topping a small rise he came to a place where the trees were not so numerous. He was able to look down on the water and the beach. Sure enough, there was Captain Tyler—but wait a minute! There was something wrong! Ogilby's thoughts ran back to the neighbor boy, Harley's story of a few weeks ago. The physician's heart pounded and he broke into a run coming off the little promontory and starting through the rest of the wooded part for the beach.

For Tyler had been in sight all right, but where he had no right to be—in water up to his waist and heading further out, struggling and splashing—as though against some unseen underwater force that was inexorably pulling him out.

Just before Ogilby cleared the last of the trees to run onto the beach, a scream came back to him. And then it was strangely muffled as though from beneath the water. There was also the sound of mad thrashing and splashing—and then Ogilby was on the beach rushing toward where he had last seen Captain Tyler, for the Captain was no more. He had vanished completely. Ogilby stormed up and down the beach for several minutes, then he rushed back calling at the top of his lungs: "Mrs. Ives! Mrs. Ives!"

After several tries, he got a response.

"Come down here quickly and bring anybody else you can get."

Ogilby strode back to the water's edge and peered out over the now rippleless surface. The tide was coming in. But there was no indication of where Tyler had gone. Should he wade out a ways? This question was settled for Dr. Ogilby when suddenly about two hundred yards off the beach, something black and loglike and motionless quietly broke the surface of the water. Ogilby fought the terror that choked his throat. It was a human body floating out there . . . face down!

BY NOW, Mrs. Ives came gasping up and not far behind, the lanky form of Harley with his father in tow, both panting. Ogilby motioned out to the water mutely. Mrs. Ives' near-sighted eyes nearly popped trying to make out what it was. Harley said, "Geeze," and Harley, Sr. gasped.

"Well, what's this all about?" said the housekeeper irritably, but the tide was slowly nudging the black rigid form closer. Mrs. Ives gaped then. A few more minutes and the body bobbed and drifted its slow way up near the beach line. The men waded in and tugged at the weight—the body was got up on the dry sand.

Dr. Ogilby felt for pulse but this time there was not the faintest flicker of life. The face was frozen in a terrible mask of horror. The body was stiff and woodenlike. The arms held rigid, huge fists clenched tightly.

"Give me a hand here," muttered Ogilby, and the man and boy helped him tote the big body up to the house in dreary procession.

Ogilby hustled the others from the skipper's room, wanting to make a thorough examination in private. Straightened out on his own bed, Captain Tyler's figure was forlorn. There was no question about it. The man had died of drowning. Dr. Ogilby was interested in the rigidity of the body. He tried to bend Tyler's arms from the elbow. The man's features had been sealed as though by concrete and plaster, by a fear so great that it had changed his very appearance. It was then and only then that the physician noticed that there was something in the left clenched fist. For some minutes, he worked over the dead sailor, working and forcing the strong fingers apart. Finally he succeeded in opening them.

In the palm of Captain Tyler's hand was a lump of wetness almost like seaweed. Without looking closely Ogilby absently dropped it into his own pocket. As he brushed against the body, a jingling noise attracted his attention. Stopping to examine it, methodically he went through the old sailor's pocket, finally finding a huge ring with many jingling keys upon it. A sudden thought occurred to the physician. He crossed to the forbidden closet that was never opened and tried one after another of the keys. At last, one fitted. He slipped back the bolt and pulled at the knob. The inside and contents of the closet were unspectacular. An old chest in the corner which, when the lid was lifted, revealed nothing but some worthless trinkets, probably of only sentimental value; a cutlass on the floor, some colored blankets, picked up in some exotic port, and some old shipmaster's equipment. Ogilby was about to leave when his eye was caught by something hanging in the corner. He moved closer. There was a skipper's uniform, perhaps of another decade, old but well kept and brushed, the buttons shiny. Then he leaned forward. There was a piece of cloth torn out of the front and the third button with it. The master's jacket Tyler had worn on the *Betsy Mae*.

His hands shaking, Ogilby leaned forward and looked at the rent closely for several moments. Ogilby quit the closet then, locking the door carefully behind him. He replaced the keys and covered Captain Tyler. Then he crossed to the window of the little bedroom. He looked out, and below he could see the water. The ways of the sea were strange, he thought, taking no account of time and distance and even death.

He felt into his pocket then and brought forth what he knew he would find. The wet clump of something that was old cloth serge, with a rusted button in the center, strangely preserved it was . . . and perfectly matching that rip in the old master's uniform hanging in the closet!

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Bang! You're Dead!

By RAY BRADBURY

Wounds were fake, men lying there were playing, blood was only something like catsup—you didn't get caught if you could duck like Johnny Choir

JOHNNY CHOIR came like the spring lambs over the green Italian hills, gamboling at the game of war. He leaped a line of bullets as if it were the hedge fronting his Iowa home. He ducked and dodged; a pedestrian in war traffic. Most of all, he laughed and was indefatigable as some khaki kangaroo, forever hopping.

Bullets, mortar shells and shrapnel were only rumors in the air to Johnny. They were not true.

He moved with long-legged strides near San Vittore, froze, pointed his gun, fingered the trigger, cried, "Bang! I gotcha!" and

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

watched a German fall with a red orchid pinned to one lapel. Then Johnny jigged again, to escape the answering machine-gun blast.

An artillery shell approached. Johnny twisted, crying, "Missed!"

It did. It missed, *like always.*

Private Smith followed in Johnny's wake. Only Smith traveled on his thin-muscled stomach, face sweaty and juju'd with Italian mud. Smith crawled, ran, fell, got up again, and never let those enemy bullets near him. Frequently he yelled angrily at Johnny:

"Lie down, you dumb egg! They'll gut you!"

But Johnny danced on to the metal music of bullets like new, bright hummingbirds on the air. While Smith crawled earthwormwise taking each kilometer, Johnny catapulted toward the enemy, giggling. Tall as the sky, loud as a bazooka gun! Smith broke out a ration of cold sweat just watching the kid.

Germans screamed and ran away from Johnny. When they saw his limbs flourished in a kind of classical St. Vitus—while bullets whistled under his ear-lobes, between his knees and betwixt thumb and forefinger—German morale disintegrated. They fled wildly!

Laughing heartily, Johnny Choir sat down, pulled out a chocolate ration and teethed on it, while Smith came inching up. Johnny glimpsed the crawling figure's exposed rump, and inquired, "Smith?"

The anonymous rump went down, a familiar thin face came up. "Yeah." Firing had ceased in the area. They were alone and safe. Smith wiped dirt from his chin. "Honest to God, I get the weemies watching you. You gallop around like a kid in the rain. Only it's the wrong kind of rain."

"I'll duck," said Johnny, munching.

He had a big handsome face with blue child eyes captured in innocent wonder in it, and small pink child lips. His shorn hair resembled the blonde stubble of a clothes brush. Now immersed deeply in the enjoyment of candy, he had forgotten war.

"I duck," he explained again.

A thousand times Smith'd heard that excuse. It was *too* simple an explanation. God had a hand in this somewhere, Smith was certain. Johnny had probably been dunked in holy water. Bullets detoured around him, not daring to touch. Yeah. That was it. Smith laughed musingly.

"What happens if you forget to duck, Johnny?"

Johnny replied, "I play dead."

"YOU—" said Smith, blinking, staring, "—you play dead. Uh-huh." He exhaled slowly. "Yeah. Sure. Okay."

Johnny threw away the candy wrapper. "I been thinking. It's almost my turn to play dead, isn't it? Everybody's done it, except me. It's only fair I take my turn. Everybody's been so decent about it, I think *I'll* play dead today."

Smith found that his hands were shaking. His appetite was gone, too. "Now what do you want to talk that way for?" he argued.

"I'm tired," said Johnny simply.

"Take a nap, then. You're the damnedest one for snoozing. Take a nap."

Johnny considered that with a pout. Then he arranged himself on the grass in the shape of a fried shrimp. "All right, Private Smith. If you say so."

Smith consulted his watch. "You got twenty minutes. Snooze fast. We'll be moving up as soon as the captain shows. And we don't want him finding you asleep."

BUT Johnny was already deep in soft dreams. Smith looked at him with wonder and envy. God, what a guy. Sleeping in the middle of hell. Smith had to stay, watching over him. It wouldn't do to have some stray German sniping Johnny while he couldn't duck. Strangest damn thing he ever knew. . . .

A soldier ran heavily up, panting. "Hi, Smith!"

Smith recognized the soldier, uneasily. "Oh, it's you, Melter . . ."

"Somebody wounded?" Melter was big, too, but off-center with his fat and too high and hoarse with his voice. "Oh, it's Johnny Choir. Dead?"

"Taking a nap."

Melter gaped. "A nap? For cripes sake, that infant! That moron!"

Smith said, quietly, "Moron, hell. He just brushed the Heinies off this rise with one hand. I saw them throw a thousand rounds at Johnny, a thousand rounds, mind

you, and Johnny slipped through it like a knife through warm ribs."

Melter's pink face looked worried. "What makes him tick, anyway?"

Smith shrugged. "As far as I can figure, he thinks this is all a game. He never grew up. He's got a big body with a kid's mind in it. He doesn't take war serious. He thinks we're all playing at this."

Melter swore. "Don't I wish we were." He eyed Johnny jealously. "I've watched him before, running like a fool, and he's still alive. Him and that shimmy of his, and yelling, "Missed me!" like a kid, and yelling "Gotcha!" when he shot a Heinie. How do you explain that?"

Johnny turned in his sleep, and his lips fumbled with words. A couple came out, soft, easy. "Mom! Hey, Mom! You there? Mom? You there, Mom?"

Smith reached over to take Johnny's hand. Johnny squeezed it in his sleep, saying, with a little smile, "Oh, Mom."

"So now," said Smith, "after all this, I'm a mother."

They stayed there, the three of them, for all of three minutes, silent. Melter finally cleared his throat, nervously. "Some—somebody ought to tell Johnny about the facts of life. Death is real, and war is real, and bullets can knock out your guts. Let's tell him when he wakes up."

Smith laid Johnny's hand aside. He pointed at Melter, and his face got paler and harder with each word. "Look now, don't come around here with your philosophy! What's bad for you ain't bad for him! Let him dream his dreams, if he wants. I been with him since boot-camp, watching over him like a brother. I know. There's only one thing that keeps him in one piece, and that's thinking the things he thinks, believing that war is fun and we're all kids! And if you so much as flip your lip, I'll drop you in the Gagliano River with anchors on."

"Okay, okay, don't get tough. I only thought—"

Smith stood up. "You thought. You thought! Why, damn you, I can see the stinking look on your face! You'd like to see Johnny dead. You're yellow jealous, that's what! Well, now look—" He made a sweep of his arm, furiously. "—you keep away! From now on, you romp on the other side of any hill we're on! I don't want you running off at the mouth! Now, get the hell out of here!"

Melter's fat face was red as Italian *vino*. He held his gun hard. His fingers itched the butt end of it. "It ain't fair," he replied tightly, hoarsely. "It ain't fair to us that he gets by. It ain't fair he lives while we die. What you expect, me to love him? Ha! When I gotta die, he lives, so I should kiss him? I don't work that way!"

Melter strode off, his back stiff and working funny, his neck like a ramrod, his fingers tight fists, his strides short and jolting.

Smith watched him. There I go with my big mouth, he thought. I should have stroked him nice. Now, maybe he tells the captain, and the captain turns Johnny over to the psychiatric ward for observation. Then maybe they trundle him back to the States and I lose my best friend. God, Smith, you lummox! Why ain't you got lockjaw?

Johnny was waking up, rubbing eyes with big farmer-boy knuckles, tongue exploring the outer reaches of his chin for stray particles of ration chocolate.

They went over another hill together, Johnny Choir and Private Smith. Johnny dancing in his special way, always ahead. Smith wisely but not happily bringing up the rear; afraid where Johnny was never afraid, careful where Johnny always splurged, groaning while Johnny was laughing into enemy fire. . . .

"JOHNNY!"

It was inevitable. As Smith felt the machine-gun bullet enter his right side, just above the hip, felt pain hammer, pound, wallop through him under tremendous striking impact, felt blood running in pulses through suddenly slippery, numb fingers, smelled his own blood like some nightmare chemical, he knew it was inevitable.

He yelled again.

"Johnny!"

Johnny stopped. He came running back, grinning. He put away his grin when he saw Smith lying there giving a blood transfusion to the body of the Earth.

"Hey, Private Smith, what's this about?" he asked.

"I'm—I'm playing wounded," said Smith on one elbow, not looking up, sucking in air,

blowing it out. "You—go on ahead, Johnny, and don't mind me."

Johnny looked like a kid told to stand in the corner.

"Hey. That's not fair. You should've told me, and I could play wounded, too. I'll get too far ahead and you won't be able to catch up."

Smith forced a sick smile, weak and pale, and the blood pumped. "You were always too far ahead of me anyway, Johnny. Even if I ran in circles around you, I could never catch up."

That was too subtle for Johnny, who gave forth with a confused scowl. "I thought you were my pal, Smith?"

"Sure. Sure I am, Johnny. I am." Smith coughed. "Sure. But, you see, I just sudden-like found out I was tired. It came on me quick, you see. No time to tell you. So I'm playing wounded."

Johnny brightened, crouching down. "I'll play wounded, too."

"Like hell you will!" Smith tried to rise, but pain clenched him in a hot, tight fist, and he couldn't speak for half a minute. Then: "Look now—you keep your nose out of this. You get the hell on to Rome!"

Johnny said, "You don't want me to play —wounded?"

"No, dammit!" cried Smith, and things got darker, darker.

Johnny said nothing, just stood there, tall and quiet and not understanding, and lost. Here was the man who had been his best friend since the first day in the Army, since leaving New York harbor; his best friend all up through Africa, the Sicilian hills and Italy, now lying here and telling him to go on—alone.

In the webbed dark of his mind, Smith felt it, too. Keen and sharp like a new kind of razor slicing him down the middle. Wounded, and Johnny going on alone.

Who would tell Johnny to keep away from bodies, it was against the rules? Who would assure him, as Smith'd done, to keep intact that incredible phantasy of Johnny's beliefs; who would assure him that those wounds were fake, that this blood was only something like catsup carried by soldiers when they wanted time out? Who would censor Johnny's outbursts like that time in Tunis when Johnny asked his commanding officer?

"When do I get my bottle of catsup, sir?"

"Catsup. Catsup?"

"Yes, sir, for when I want to be wounded, sir?"

Who would storm in and explain to the commanding officer, "You see, sir, Johnny means, does he carry his blood plasma with him from the Red Cross, sir? In case he needs a transfusion, sir."

"Uh. Oh, is *that* what he means? No. The medical unit carries that. They'll give it to you when the necessity arises."

Who will extricate Johnny from situations like that? Or the time Johnny asked of a senior officer, "If I play dead, sir, how long do I stay dead before I'm allowed to get up, sir?"

Who will tell the officer that Johnny is only joking, sir, only joking, ha ha, and not an infant in overgrown skin. Who? thought Smith.

SOMEONE hurried up in the dimness of pain and the sounds of conflict. By the sound of the big clumsy feet, Smith knew it was Melter.

Melter's voice came from the gathering dark.

"Oh, it's you, Johnny. Who's that at your feet? Well—" Melter laughed. Johnny laughed, too, to be compatible. Oh, Johnny, how can you laugh? If you only knew, son. "Well, well, if it ain't Smith. Dead?"

Johnny said, eagerly. "No, only playing wounded."

"Playing?" said Melter. Smith couldn't see the man, but he heard the subtle sound of Melter's tongue touching that word. "Playing, eh? Playing wounded. So. Hmm."

Smith got his eyes open, but he couldn't speak, he could only blink, watching Melter.

Melter spat on the ground. "Can you talk, Smith? No? Good." Melter looked in four directions, nodding, satisfied. He took Johnny by the shoulder. "Come here, Johnny, I'd like to ask a few questions."

"Sure, Private Melter."

Melter patted Johnny's arm, and his eyes shone hot and funny. "I hear you're the lad who knows how to duck bullets?"

"Sure. Best ducker in the army. Smith's pretty good, too. A little slower, maybe, but I'm teaching him."

Melter said, "Think you can teach me, Johnny?"

Johnny said, "You already learned, haven't you?"

"Have I?" Melter wondered. "Well, yeah, I guess I have—a little. Sure. But not like you, Johnny. You got the technique down good. What—what's the secret?"

Johnny considered a moment, and Smith tried to say something, tried to shout or scream or even wriggle, and he didn't have the strength. He heard Johnny say, far away.

"I don't know. You know how it is when you're a kid and play cops and robbers. The other guy is selfish. He never wants to lie down, when you say 'Bang, I gotcha!' The whole secret is in saying, 'Bang, I gotcha!' first. Then they've *got* to lie down."

"Oh." Melter looked at him as if he were crazy. "Say that again, will you?"

Johnny said it again, and Smith had to laugh inside his hell of pain. Melter thought he was being kidded. Johnny said it again.

"Don't hand me that!" snarled Melter, impatiently. "There's a good deal more to it than that! You go running and jumping around like a bull-moose and nobody even touches you!"

"I duck," said Johnny.

Smith laughed some more. Old jokes are the best jokes.

Then Smith's stomach caught and held pain.

Melter's face was all deep-cut lines and suspicion and hate.

"Okay, smart guy, if you're so good—suppose you walk off a hundred feet and let me take pot shots at you?"

Johnny smiled. "Sure. Why not?"

He walked off and left Melter standing there. He walked off a hundred paces and stood there tall and blond and so damn young and clean as butter. Smith wiggled his fingers, screaming inside. "Johnny, don't do it, Johnny! For Crissake, God, knock Melter down with the butt-end of a lightning bolt!"

THEY were in a kind of depression between hills, a small place where you could do things and not be seen too well by anyone. Melter stood against the trunk of an olive tree so as to shield his action, just in case, and casually lifted his gun.

Melter loved his gun with his fingers, carefully adjusting it to his eyes, finding Johnny in the sights, caressing the trigger, pulling back slowly.

Where in hell IS everybody! wondered Smith. AH!

Melter fired.

Johnny ducked.

"Missed me!" came Johnny's good-humored shout.

Johnny stood, intact. Melter swore. Melter aimed again, even slower this time. He found Johnny's heart with the sight and Smith screamed some more, but none of it got out of his mouth. Melter licked his lips and—fired!

"Missed again!" observed Johnny.

Melter fired four times more, quicker, faster, angered and potent and furious, color gorging his neck, rage in his eyes, hands fumbling—and with each report that knocked the warm afternoon air, Johnny skipped rope or ducked doors or sidestepped elbows or kicked a football or did a ballet dance, and Melter's gun fumed empty.

Melter rammed more bullets in it, his face now blanched white, his knees sagging.

Johnny came running up.

Melter whispered, fearfully. "How in God's name do you do it?"

"Like I told you."

A long pause. "Do you think I could learn."

"Anybody can learn, if they want."

"Teach me. Teach me, Johnny. I don't want to die, I don't want to die. I hate this whole damn war. Teach me, Johnny. Teach me, and I'll be your friend."

Johnny shrugged. "Do just like I told you, that's all."

Melter said, slowly. "Now, you are joking again."

"No, I'm not."

"Yes, I think you are joking again," said Melter in a pale, thick anger. He shifted his gun to the ground, considering new tactics and decided about it. "Well, listen here, smart boy, for your information, I will tell you something." He jerked one hand. "Those men you passed in the field, they weren't playing, no, they were really, actually, finally dead! Dead, yes, dead, you hear! Dead! Not playing, not kidding, not joking, but dead, dead, cold dead!" He beat it at Johnny like fists. He beat the air with

it and turned the day into winter cold. "Dead!"

Smith winced inside. Johnny, don't listen to him! Don't let him hurt you, Johnny! Go on believing the world is a good place. Go on living intact and unafraid! Don't let fear in, Johnny. You'll crumble with it!

Johnny said to Melter, "What're you talking about?"

"Death!" bellowed Melter wildly. "That's what I'm talking about! Death. You can die, and Smith can die, and I can die from bullets. Gangrene, rot, death! You've been fooling yourself. Grow up, you fool, before it's too late! Grow up!"

Johnny stood there a long time, and then he began to sway, his fists in big farmer-knotted pendulums. "No. You're lying," he said, stubbornly.

"Bullets can kill, this is war!"

"You're lying to me," said Johnny.

"You can die, so can Smith. Smith's dying now. Smell his blood! What do you think that stench is from the fox-holes, wild grapes for the winepresses of war? Yes, death and bones!"

Johnny looked around with unsteady eyes. "No, I won't believe it." He bit his lips and closed his eyes. "I won't. You're mean, you're bad, you're—"

"You can die, Johnny, die!"

Johnny began to cry, then. Like a babe in some barren wilderness, and Smith wrenched his shoulder trying to get up. Johnny cried and it was a new and small sound in the wide world.

Melter pushed Johnny staggeringly toward the front lines. "Go on. Get out there and die, Johnny. Get out there and get your heart pinned on a stone wall like a dripping medal!"

Don't go, Johnny, Smith's shouting got lost in the red, pain cavern of his interior, lost and useless and mute. Don't go, kid. Stay here, don't listen to this guy! Stick around, Johnny-lad!

Johnny stumbled away, sobbing, toward the blunt staccato of machine guns, toward the whine of artillery shells. His gun was held in one long limp arm, its butt dragging pebbles in a dry rattling stone laughter.

Melter looked after him in a hysterical kind of triumph.

Then Melter hefted his weapon and walked East over another hill, out of view.

Smith lay there, his thoughts getting sicker and dimmer, and Johnny walked on and on. If only there were some way to cry out. *Johnny, look out!*

An artillery shell came over and burst. Johnny fell down on the ground without a sound and lay there, not making a movement of his once-miraculous limbs.

Johnny!

Have you stopped believing? Johnny, get up! Are you dead now? Johnny?

And then darkness mercifully gathered Smith in and swallowed him down.

SCALPELS rose and fell like small keen guillotines, cutting away death and decay, beheading misery, eliminating metal pain. The bullet, plucked from Smith's wound, was cast away, small, dark, clattering into a metal pan. The doctors pantomimed over and around him in a series of blurred frenzies. Smith breathed easily.

Across the dim interior of the tent Johnny's body lay on another operating table, doctors curious over him in a sterile tableau.

"Johnny?" and this time Smith had a voice.

"Easy does it," a doctor cautioned. The lips under the white mask moved. "That a friend of yours—over there?"

"Yeah. How is he?"

"Not so good. Head injury. Fifty-fifty chance."

They concluded with Smith, stitches, swabbings, bandages and all. Smith watched the wound vanish under white gauze, then he looked at the assembled crowd of medics. "Let me help with him, will you?"

"Well, now, after all, soldier—"

"I know the guy. I know him. He's funny. If it means keeping him alive, how's about it?"

The scowl formed over the surgical mask, and Smith's heart beat slow, slow. The doctor blinked. "I can't chance it. What can you possibly do to help me?"

"Wheel me over. I tell you I can help. I'm his bosom-pal. I can't let him conk out now. Hell, no!"

The doctors conferred.

They transferred Smith to a portable stretcher and two orderlies delivered him across the tent where the surgeons were engaged with Johnny's shaved, naked skull.

Johnny looked asleep and dreaming a nightmare. His face twisted, worried, frightening, wondering, disappointed and dismayed. One of the surgeons sighed.

Smith touched one surgical elbow. "Don't give up, Doc. Oh, God, don't give up." To Johnny: "Johnny-lad. Listen. Listen to me. Forget everything Melter said. Forget everything he said—you hear me? He was full of crap up to here!"

Johnny's face still was irritated, changing like disturbed water. Smith gathered his breath and continued.

"Johnny, you gotta go on playing, like always. Go on ducking, like in the old days. You always knew how, Johnny. It was part of you. It didn't take learning or teaching, it was natural. And you let Melter put ideas in your head. Ideas that may be okay for people like Melter and me and others, but don't jibe for you."

One surgeon made an impatient gesture with a rubber-gloved hand.

Smith asked him, "Is his head hurt bad, Doc?"

"Pressure on the skull, on the brain. May cause temporary loss of memory."

"Will he remember being wounded?"

"It's hard to say. Probably not."

Smith had to be held down. "Good! Good! Look," he whispered quickly, confidentially to Johnny's head. "Johnny, just think about being a kid, and how it was then, and don't think about what happened today. Think about running in ravines and through creeks and skipping pebbles on water, and ducking b-b guns, and laughing, Johnny!"

Inside, Johnny thought about it.

A MOSQUITO hummed somewhere, hummed and circled for an endless time. Somewhere guns rumbled.

Someone finally told Smith, "Respiration improved."

Someone else said, "Heart action picking up."

Smith kept talking, part of him that wasn't pain, that was only hope and anxiety in his larynx, and fear-fever in his brain. The war thunder came closer, closer, but it was only the blood hurled through his head by his heart. Half an hour passed by. Johnny listened like a kid in school to an over-patient teacher. Listened and smoothed out the pain, erased the dismay in his expression, and regained the old certainty and youth and sureness and calm acceptance of belief.

The surgeon stripped off his tight rubber gloves.

"He'll pull through."

Smith felt like singing. "Thanks, doc. Thanks."

The doc said, "You from Unit 45, you and Choir and a guy named Melter?"

"Yeah. What about Melter?"

"Funniest darn thing. Ran head on into a burst of German machine-gun fire. Ran down a hill screaming something about being a kid again." The doc scratched his jaw. "We picked up his body with fifty bullets in it."

Smith swallowed, lying back to sweat. Ice-cold, shivering sweat.

"That's Melter for you. He just didn't know how. He grew up, too fast, like all of us. He didn't know how to stay young, like Johnny. That's why it didn't work. I—I gotta give him credit for trying, though, the nut. But there's only one Johnny Choir."

"You," diagnosed the surgeon, "are delirious. Better take a sedative."

Smith shook his head. "What about home? Are we going, Johnny and I, with our wounds?"

The surgeon formed a smile under the mask. "Home to America, the two of you."

"Now, you're delirious!" Smith let out a careful whoop of glee. He twisted to get a good look at Johnny sleeping so peacefully and easily and dreaming, and he said, "You hear that, Johnny? We're going home! You and me! Home!"

And Johnny replied, softly, "Mom? Oh, Mom."

Smith held Johnny's hand. "Okay," he said to the surgeons. "So now I'm a mother. Pass the cigars!"

The Devil's Ticket

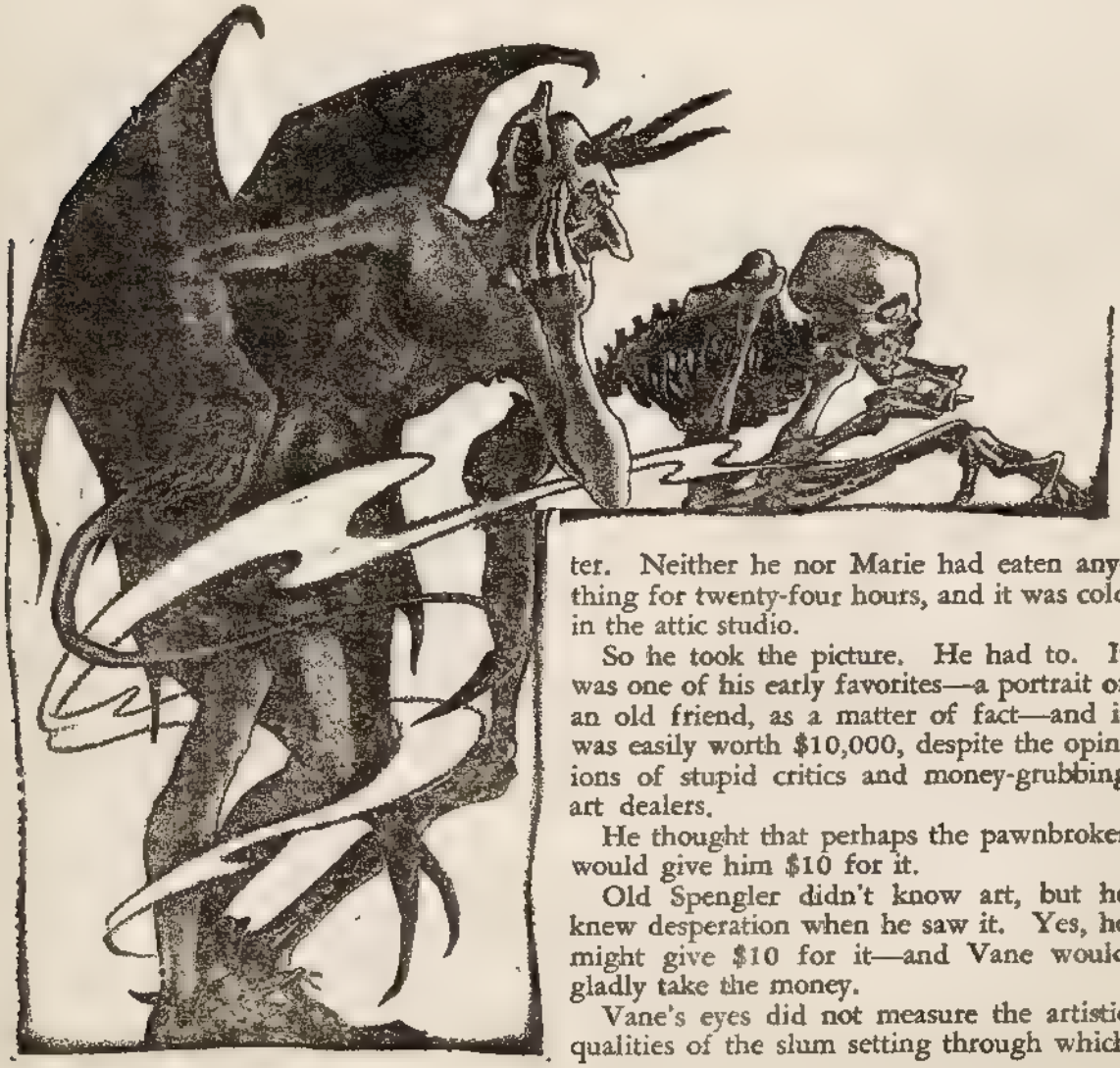
By ROBERT BLOCH

HECTOR VANE'S cape flapped forlornly as he trudged along toward the pawnshop. It was a familiar route; Vane had followed it many times before on the same errand. At the beginning, his burdens had been light — his rings, a watch, a gold-headed cane, silver candlesticks. Then, bit by bit, everything had gone. Everything but his pictures. The paintings he would not pawn. Not his portraits. It would never come to that.

But it had come to just that. Hector Vane was carrying a portrait under his bedraggled black cape. Marie had found some old newspaper and a bit of string, and she had tied it up for him. Vane sat staring at the package for almost an hour before he summoned the resolution necessary to pick it up and leave the garret.

There was simply no choice in the matter. Neither he nor Marie had eaten anything for twenty-four hours, and it was cold in the attic studio.

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV



So he took the picture. He had to. It was one of his early favorites—a portrait of an old friend, as a matter of fact—and it was easily worth $10,000, despite the opinions of stupid critics and money-grubbing art dealers.

He thought that perhaps the pawnbroker would give him $10 for it.

Old Spengler didn't know art, but he knew desperation when he saw it. Yes, he might give $10 for it—and Vane would gladly take the money.

Vane's eyes did not measure the artistic qualities of the slum setting through which

he walked. Instead he peered anxiously at the dull basement windows of Spengler's pawnshop. The junk-cluttered windows mirrored the myriad misfortunes of those who entered here. Spengler's place was a repository for the souvenirs of human woe; mementoes of miseries.

Hector Vane sighed, held the paper-wrapped picture tightly against his cloak, and descended the dirty stairs. As he opened the pawnshop door, the bell jangled a note of complaint and warning.

Vane blinked through semi-darkness as he approached the counter. The darkness held a musty smell, and released it now to his nostrils as he waited for Spengler to appear from the back of the shop. Spengler was an old man. He liked to doze on a gloomy afternoon. Perhaps he was still asleep—

No, footsteps heralded his approach. A shuffling figure emerged from the rear of the establishment and moved along behind the counter in the shadows.

"Yes?"

It was a soft voice; not Spengler's habitual croak.

Hector Vane tried to get a clear view of the stranger, but shadows obscured.

"Where's Spengler?" he asked.

"He's finished. I've taken over."

NOW Vane could see the speaker. He was an old man; a very old man, at first glance. His hair was the color of yellowed ivory, and his skin had the parchment texture of incunabula. Flaring from the sides of his skull were curiously pointed ears, which lent the sole distinguishing touch to his aged visage. That touch, and the brightness of his eyes, impressed Vane. There was something beyond incongruity here, and Vane felt that if he stared long enough, searched long enough, he might discover the key to a peculiarly complicated enigma.

But enough of that. He wasn't here to analyze. He was here to sell a painting.

"I would like a loan," he said. "On this." His voice faltered slightly as he spoke, and in order to conceal his confusion, Vane quickly and clumsily tore the newspaper wrappings from the portrait.

His hands trembled slightly as he held it up toward the counter.

"Perhaps if we had more light—" he muttered.

The old man shook his head.

"I do not need the light," he said. He stared at the portrait with an enigmatic smile—or was it merely the fixed expression of senility?

"You have great talent," said the old man, softly. "Genius, perhaps."

Vane smiled. He had an artist's love of praise, and he was thinking that the $10 would soon be his.

"What will you offer me for it on a loan?" he asked.

An innocent person must not be delivered into the hands of that black being masquerading as a pawnshop proprietor

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

The old man shrugged. "I cannot pay you what it is worth," he murmured. "Besides, I do not want paintings. I deal in other things."

"But it's all I have to pawn," Vane pleaded.

"I'm not so sure. Put the picture down. Let me look at you."

VANE laid the picture on the counter, and then the old man's stare seized him. It seized, held, drained. Vane tried to stare back, but all he could see was the eyes. The very bright eyes, knives in darkness that stabbed into his being. It was silly imagery—but it was real. And the old man was whispering, softly.

"Hector Vane, you are a great artist. You do not belong in a garret, yoked to a plain woman. You were not shaped for suffering. You should be rich, famous. I think . . . yes . . . I am certain . . . I can give you the things you desire. Riches . . . and fame. . . ."

"What do you want of me?"

"Your soul."

It didn't sound fanciful—not with those eyes; staring, reading, searching and finding. The eyes were real. They were reality and all else was illusion. Vane knew it, felt it.

"I must sell you my soul?"

"No. You may pawn it. The usual ticket, for ninety days. In return, fame and riches, all that you have desired. And at the end of that time, you can redeem your pledge."

"How?"

"By painting a picture for me. That's all I want . . . a picture. For my—private collection." The old man smiled, and Vane could see his face again. "But we will not talk about that now. I can see that you're wondering if I might be a little—eccentric, shall we say? So I'd best proceed to prove my claim to you. Is it agreed?"

Hector Vane nodded, slowly.

From that point on, things moved swiftly; too swiftly for memory to follow. The old man gave him a blue pawn-ticket, the necessary form was filled out, Vane signed something, the old man wrapped the picture for him, and in a twinkling he was out on the street again. The wrapped portrait was under his arm and the blue ticket was in the inside pocket of his cloak. Vane was trudging home.

He was almost at the doorway before he realized his situation. He was coming home without the money, without anything except a blue pawn-ticket made out to him by a crazy old man. What could he tell Marie? She'd nag him for not bringing the money, and if he told her the truth she'd do more than nag—she'd cry. And Vane couldn't stand the sight of her weeping; weeping quietly, with her face contorted in an ugly grimace of despair.

Vane paused on the curb before the squat frame tenement in which he lived. It was late, but perhaps he could try another pawnshop. Perhaps he could—

"Hector!"

Vane whirled. Marie came running through the doorway, her brown hair tumbled on her neck. Her eyes were wide.

"Hector! He just called—on the landlady's phone—he wants to see you right away—tonight—"

"Who?"

"Eppert! Lanson wants to give you a one-man show at the Gallery. Eppert says he's prepared to buy six of the big oils now, and he knows that after the showing he can dispose of a dozen more, at least."

So this was *it*. This was the way *it* happened. Hector Vane blinked and clutched the blue pawn-ticket in his pocket. It couldn't be real. But the ticket was real.

II

IT HAPPENED like that. Things began to flow like a movie montage as thirty days sped by. The triumphal showing. The reviews. The 14 sales. And then Lanson's market tip. Aircraft stocks, and a rise of 30 points in a few weeks.

Came the new bank account, came the dinners and parties, came the big studio near Washington Heights.

Came Nadja.

Nadja was the model for the new portrait. She was a tall, shapely blonde. She had a face that was all slanted eyes, protruding cheekbones, and pouting lips. There was a sensual quality in Nadja that Vane meant to capture for the picture—and for himself.

Of course he knew better. Artists and models—that sort of thing just didn't work out. But Nadja was different. She was necessary to complete his position. The money, the fame, the success; nothing mattered unless Nadja rounded out the picture.

Marie just didn't fit. That was the cold truth, and Vane discovered it immediately. The faithful wife, the patient nagger, the plain woman with the heart of gold—that was a garret role she could fulfil perfectly. But she couldn't stand up to the part in the galleries, or at the parties, or in the gay Bohemian atmosphere that is maintained by moneyed intelligentsia who are neither gay nor Bohemian.

It wasn't just a question of looks. Beauty parlors and *couterieres* accomplished miracles. But nothing could alter Marie's temperament, and she remained a mocking reminder of former failure in this atmosphere of newfound success. A ghost-wife.

Vane talked to her, reasoned with her, argued with her. And then, when Nadja came, he forgot her.

Nadja's body was a golden flame burning before secret altars. Nadja's lips were shaped for strange kisses, and her eyes mirrored fugitive visions from the dark side of the moon.

Nadja was a vulgar floosie, too, but Vane ignored that. It didn't matter, as long as she completed the picture.

So he made her pose for him. During that second month he tried to capture her spirit on canvas and strove valiantly to capture her flesh.

In neither venture was he wholly successful. As an artist, Vane sensed difficulties at every turn. Whether he reproduced her features with photographic fidelity or allowed his brush to express the abstract feeling inherent in her face and body, the results were unsatisfactory. This was strange, for Vane could paint portraits. Yet whatever he did, he ended with a sketch or a half-finished portrait of a vulgar floosie. It wasn't right, it couldn't be right. But there it was.

As a man, his difficulties multiplied. Nadja was not responsive to his endearments. She wanted a star sapphire she'd admired, and she thought it would be nice to have a place of her own—you know, with that blond finish on the furniture to match her hair. And she wished Hector would stop pawing her during the sittings. She didn't think much of artists anyway, they were a bunch of spoiled brats. And did he have to wear that corny cloak?

After such a tongue-lashing from lips that were shaped for strange kisses, Vane would turn in despair to the relief of alcohol.

His love was not blind, merely myopic; and it took liquor to blot Nadja's imperfections from his view.

Weeks blended into months; flying by in a bewildering blur of intoxication.

Then, one afternoon, Vane sat blinking in his studio apartment. The north light was clear, but the room reeled before his gaze. Vane pressed slim fingers to his aching temples and stared.

Something rose before his eyes; something black and crawling; something that writhed and wriggled with thick coils holding a cryptic shape and meaning.

Vane gazed again, and then realized what it was he saw—it was the heavy black-numeral date on his calendar pad.

Without knowing it, his lips moved and made vocal his secret thought.

"Two and a half months gone," he whispered. "That means . . . yes . . . only two weeks more to go. Two more weeks, and then . . ."

Then what?

Vane sat bolt upright. Yes, then what?

INTOXICATION of fame, intoxication of flesh, intoxication of alcohol; all had blotted out that which he now remembered.

Somewhere an old man was waiting, waiting for him to appear and redeem a blue pawn ticket. A ticket for a human soul. He must paint a portrait, quickly, for he had but two weeks left in which to carry out the bargain.

Vane groaned aloud.

Perhaps he was a fool. Perhaps the old man was mad, and coincidence had brought him that for which he had bargained.

And yet, Vane was afraid. He remembered the shop now, and the shadows, and the way the old man's eyes had gloated. He remembered the secret smile, and the pact he had sealed. He knew then that he must take no chances. He must make the painting.

Unless—

There was a wild hope in Vane's heart. Perhaps, if he were to seek out the old man, talk to him reasonably, he might find another solution. It could all be a joke, really. His dissipation had warped his thinking, cost him his nerve. Better to go down there now and bargain.

Vane put on his tattered black cape, incongruous though it was in contrast to his new, expensive suit.

Once again he trudged through mean streets, searching for the shop in the shadows.

Once again the bell tinkled into musty darkness as Vane entered the pawnshop.

He groped his way toward the counters, alone in the gloom save for the host of shadows the bell had summoned. They clustered deeply behind the empty counters and Vane stared into a well of blackness.

Something emerged from the well—something white, grubby, incredibly old. The face of the aged stranger loomed. His eyes slitted curiously as he recognized Vane.

"Back again," he whispered. "Well, Mr. Vane, you're a bit early. Perhaps the punctual arrival of your good fortune urges you to be equally prompt in keeping your end of our agreement."

Vane nodded absently. He noted, with sudden, inexplicable horror, the way the old man's hands had begun to twitch and dart forward over the counter. His fingers were like long yellow talons, and they rasped across the wood outstretched as though avid to grasp, to clutch, to possess.

BEHIND the withered yellow mask of a smile Vane could sense a dreadful hunger that was more than mortal hunger—a yearning, a consuming desire to take that which must not be taken, to receive that which should not be given.

Then the voice came, holding the same hunger, throbbing with the same black thirst.

"The picture, Mr. Vane—where is my picture?"

Choking back his revulsion, Vane shook his head.

"—I haven't finished it yet. That's why I came here. I wanted to talk to you about the picture."

The claws on the counter curled. The slitted eyes blazed upwards. Vane recoiled from the gaze.

"There is nothing to talk about. We made a bargain. I have kept my part of it. You must keep yours. Where is the picture?"

Van forced a smile. "Well, it's a fair question," he said. "You mentioned that you would like to own one of my paintings, and that's why I stopped by just now. I'd like to know if you have any choice. Now I was thinking that you might prefer some of my earlier works—a nice landscape, perhaps?"

The old man cackled suddenly. It was as though a shriek had ululated up from the Pit.

"Landscape? That's very clever of you, my dear sir. Very clever, indeed. Landscape!"

"But—"

"Our agreement, Mr. Vane, was for a portrait. A portrait of a human being. One of those portraits you alone can paint; one that captures the *soul.*"

There was no mirth in the voice now. And there was no hope in Vane's heart.

"The soul," he whispered. "Why do you keep insisting on the soul?"

"For a very good reason." The old man was whispering now, but the words thundered in Vane's ears. "Because I hold your soul in pawn. Unless it is redeemed in two weeks by another soul, I shall claim possession. Full possession."

"But that means somebody else will be—"

"Mine, eternally," nodded the creature behind the counter. "Yet a bargain was made. It's your soul against another's. Whose portrait you give me does not matter in the least. I will take anything, but you cannot cheat. You must paint faithfully, so that your genius will mirror the essence of the sitter.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Vane, it's a good bargain for you. Perhaps there is someone you would like to get rid of. Paint me that person's portrait and we'll both be satisfied. Bring me the picture and the ticket and everything will be legally acceptable."

Vane reeled.

"There is no other way?" he murmured.

"No other way. I shall expect you in two weeks, then. Good day."

Vane turned and stumbled blindly toward the door.

A cough sounded behind him.

"Oh, by the way. I've been observing your progress, and I'm well satisfied. Just a friendly suggestion, though—don't entangle yourself too deeply with women. They have long been allies of mine."

Another chuckle rasped in Vane's ears as he groped his way out of the shop.

He wandered back through twilit streets.

Now there was nothing more to do. Nothing to do but paint the portrait in which the soul of the sitter must shine. He must give the portrait to the old man, give him the soul that he thirsted for with a thirst older than earth.

Who would sit for the portrait?

He couldn't sacrifice any of his completed paintings. They were all in the hands of the dealers, and meant money. Besides, an innocent person must not be delivered into the hands of that black being masquerading as a pawnshop proprietor.

No, there must be a new subject. As the old man had hinted, it would be best if the subject's removal benefited Vane.

Yes, that was it. He had no doubts as to what would happen if he delivered the picture—the person it represented would vanish from earth.

Who would it be?

For a wild moment, Vane toyed with the notion of taking Nadja's portrait. He remembered the latest oil he'd attempted—remembered the sensual mouth, the greedy eyes, the feral brow. It was a mirror held to Nadja's selfish soul, no doubt of that.

But he couldn't give her up. No matter what she was, he wanted her. If only his wife weren't in the way, he'd have her forever.

If only his wife—

Vane blinked, shook his head.

He hastened up the stairs to the apartment door, flung it open. His wife was resting in the bedroom. He stalked across the floor, coughed.

"Marie!" he called. "Would you come here for just a moment? I think I have a marvelous idea."

III

MARIE was thrilled to think that Hector Vane had chosen to paint her portrait. Her humble love and gratitude shone from her face as she sat; it would have taken a much more clumsy artist to avoid reflecting her soul as it poured forth in her adoring smile.

Hector Vane was not clumsy. His strokes were swift and sure. A few sittings and he had completed preliminary sketching; then he fell to painting. A week sped by. Vane realized that he was creating his masterpiece. The work flowed forward. Marie was never tired; her cooperation was endless.

On the ninth day the sittings ended, and Vane stood back and gazed upon Marie; *his* Marie, faithful to life.

He had done it.

The next two days he spent in finishing the background. Then and only then did he pause to rest, sleeping the clock around for the first time in twelve days.

Marie, after one look at the finished portrait, burst into tears of happiness.

Vane couldn't meet her eyes. He turned away, and remorse burned within him. Still, it had to be.

During that week he'd neglected Nadja. Now he wanted to see her. She'd called several times.

He turned to his wife, handed her a roll of bills.

"Darling, this has been a great strain. You'll never know how much I appreciate what you've done for me. Now I want you to run downtown and buy yourself something—hats, dresses, whatever you like."

"But Hector—"

"Run along now. Please. I want you to."

Vane turned away. He couldn't stand seeing her, seeing the light of love in her eyes.

Marie dressed, left the apartment. And Vane called Nadja.

Her voice, over the telephone, was querulous.

"Where have you been? I've waited for over a week and you haven't called. I know you'll have some miserable excuse to make, but I don't want to hear it."

"Come over and I'll show you my excuse," Vane exulted.

An hour later she arrived. Vane ushered her in with a grin of exultation.

"I *have* been busy," he said. "But I won't tell you why. I'll let you see for yourself, instead."

He led her to the portrait on the easel near the window, then pulled the drapes aside.

Nadja stared.

"What do you think? Isn't it the best thing I've done? Look at the life, the coloring."

Nadja turned. On her face was written a loathing Vane was never to forget.

"So that's it," she gasped. "You painted her. You've never been able to paint me decently, but you painted her. You painted her because you love her, and always have loved her."

"Nadja, I—"

She was gone. The slam of the door cut Vane's protest off in midair.

Vane stared at the portrait. She had said he loved his wife. And he didn't. Still, she had gone away believing it, and now he was alone. It wasn't working out.

So Vane did what he had learned to do when things weren't working out. He left the apartment and got drunk.

IT WAS late when he returned.

Marie met him on the outer stairs. There was an odor in the air, and a look on her face. He sensed the truth as he gazed into her tear-filled eyes.

"That woman—the clerk downstairs says she came here this afternoon after you left. He let her in, she said it was all right. And then she set fire to—oh, Hector!"

Vane rushed into the apartment, stared at ruined walls, charred furnishings. And he stared at the blackened heap of ashes that had once been his precious paintings.

Nadja had taken her revenge.

Marie's portrait was gone. And so were all the rest, all the oils he still had on hand in the studio. Burned to ashes. His last work was gone, and with it, his last hope.

Grimly he recalled a similar incident in a book. "Of Human Bondage," wasn't it?

In this case, the deed was condemning him to bondage that wasn't human.

Tomorrow was the thirteenth day. And the old man had whispered, "Bring me my portrait."

Well, there was no portrait for the old man. There was nothing. On the fourteenth day he would go to the shop and the old man would say, "Where is my portrait?" and—

Wait a minute!

The thought that crossed Vane's mind was diabolical. Yes, it might well be so described—for it was diabolically inspired.

He turned to Marie.

"Go and get me some fresh canvas," he commanded.

"Now? But your work—it's ruined!" she protested.

"Exactly," Vane whispered. "That's why I must start over again immediately. Get me the canvas—I'm going to paint."

"But what would you paint at this hour?"

Vane shrugged, turned his eyes away.

"I cannot tell you," he declared.

"But you have no one to pose for you. Where is your model?"

Vane tapped his forehead.

"Here," he murmured. "My model is here. Now hurry. I've only twenty-four hours. Twenty-four hours for a masterpiece!"

IV

TWENTY-FOUR hours for a masterpiece. . . .

Vane worked all alone in the studio; worked as night faded into dawn, dawn burst into daylight, daylight blended into twilight, and twilight fled before the blackness of another night.

Marie did not disturb him, nor did she seek to discover what shaped itself on the canvas before him. Twice during the day she tiptoed in to bring sandwiches and coffee. He dismissed her with the food untouched.

She did not attempt to restore the ravaged room, but crept silently through the house while Vane painted furiously. He stared raptly at the canvas on the easel, and though his eyes were trance-like in their fixity, his cunning fingers moved in bold, sure strokes.

It was dawn of the fourteenth day, the fatal day. Vane stepped back, gazed at the completed portrait; shuddered, and drew a cloth over the undried picture.

Then he moaned and collapsed.

Marie half-supported, half-dragged him in to the bed. She sat there watching throughout the morning as he slept. In the afternoon he stirred long enough to take hot

soup, then collapsed once more. But his eyes were sane again, and Marie did not fear.

She smiled at his sleeping face, smiled to see that it no longer bore the ravages of hidden care or dread.

Yes, it was safe. She could leave now.

It was dark when she returned, carrying a package under her arm. She put it down in the parlor and then heard Vane stirring on the bed.

"Marie!" he called. "Where are you?"

"Here, darling."

She entered the bedroom. Vane was sitting bolt upright. His face was carefree no longer.

"Where were you? Why didn't you wake me?"

"I went out. You needed rest."

"But my appointment—"

"What appointment?"

"I must deliver this new painting today."

"Deliver it? To whom?"

"Never mind."

Vane was fumbling for his clothes, dressing in frantic haste.

"I'll be too late," he muttered.

Marie laid a hand on his shoulder. "What is it, dear? What's troubling you? Is it—is it that—woman?"

Vane turned, smiled.

"No, Marie. That woman is out of my life, out of our lives, forever. Thank God she did what she did. *He* told me that women were *his* allies. Now I believe it. When I think of what I planned to do—"

He kissed her, swiftly, unexpectedly.

"You've stood by me, at any rate. Even when you didn't understand, you were faithful and kind. Now, when I've dealt with *him,* we shall be happy."

Marie didn't understand what he was saying. But she understood his kiss, and was grateful. She smiled up at him, and then—

The bell rang, sharply.

Marie went to the door.

"There's a visitor for you, dear," she called.

"Visitor? Who is it?"

Marie came into the bedroom immediately.

"I don't know," she breathed. "He won't give me his name. Says he has business with you. An old man—"

Vane stalked out into the parlor.

There was a shadow in the hallway. The shadow moved, emerged into the parlor.

It was the ivory-skulled ancient from the pawnshop.

"Good evening, Mr. Vane," he murmured. "If the mountain will not come to—ah—Mahomet, then—ah—Mahomet must come to the mountain."

"I was detained."

"I accept your apology. But now, to business. I have come for my portrait. Is it ready?"

Vane was thankful for the dim light. Marie couldn't read the avid lust that flickered in those ageless, evil eyes.

He turned toward the window. "Yes, it's ready," he muttered.

"Excellent. And may I—see it?"

"You may. I'll snap on a light. Lift the covering on that easel if you will."

The light snapped on. A bony finger stabbed convulsively toward the cloth, tore it aside. The portrait leaped into view.

The old man stared into the bony-painted countenance of *himself*.

PAINTED from an image seared on memory, line for line . . . it was a living death's head. And yet it captured the foulness, the charnel horror that might be called a soul.

"You fool! What trickery is this?"

The words welled forth and Marie shuddered. But Vane laughed.

"You asked for a portrait of any living person. *Any* living person. And you said to me, 'Give me my portrait.' The words inspired me. Here, then, is *your* portrait. Of you. Don't deny that I've painted your soul. It's leering right out of the canvas at you. Take your hideous soul and be gone, then. I've given the devil his due."

The old man stared, then shrugged.

"I didn't believe it possible," he said. "That a mortal should trick me thus—"

"You admit you're outwitted, then?" Vane shouted in triumph. "You admit it?"

"Yes."

"Thank you for the tribute. I'm sure it was wrung from your lips. Next time you'll be a little more cautious. You thought you had me, didn't you? Thought I'd sell my own soul or that of my wife, eh? You warned me against women—well a woman saved me at the end. She burned the other portraits and I did this. You've done me a great service."

Vane took Marie in his arms and stared at the convulsed mouth of the ancient one.

"Yes, a great service," he repeated. "Not only have I outwitted you and gained fame and power—you have served to bring me and my wife together again. At last I know the true values. Ironic as it may be, you have been the cause of my spiritual regeneration. Makes you wince, doesn't it?"

Vane chuckled again. "All right, what are you waiting for? There's your portrait. Take it."

The fiendish countenance glaring out of the canvas was matched by its living counterpart.

The old man grasped the easel, then he turned.

"By the way," he said, "one little detail remains. In order to legalize this transaction, I should like you to return to me that little blue pawn-ticket I gave you."

"All right. And then, off with you."

Vane re-entered the bedroom.

"Marie!" he called. "Where did you hang my cloak? There's a ticket in the pocket, inside—"

Marie went to the doorway.

"I've a surprise for you," she said. "While you slept I went out and bought you something."

She opened the package she had carried in.

"A new cloak," she smiled. "That old one was so shabby, and I thought you deserved—"

"Marie! *What did you do with my old cloak?*"

"I—I—burned it—"

"Burned it?"

The old man appeared in the doorway. "Yes," he whispered. "Women, as I have said before, are often my allies. And your cloak is gone. The ticket is gone, too. And only the ticket redeems you from me."

"But—"

The room had grown very still. The old man glided forward. He pushed Marie aside and closed the door.

"You have done your part," he croaked. "You burned it. And now—"

Vane retreated to the wall. As the old man advanced, his claws began to work convulsively. His eyes flamed. Vane tried to scream as the claws came up and the eyes came down.

There wasn't a scream left in him.

He knew now that the cloak wasn't the only thing destined to burn.

The Path Through the Marsh

BY LEAH BODINE DRAKE

THERE is a path through a marsh
  That I must take to go home. . . .
  Mallows, and thick black loam,
Alder, and bog-grass harsh,

And the marsh-pools glinting with lights
  Of the sunset that stains the sky:
  That is all to the eye,
Yet something is there that affrights.

Something which I never see
  Though I feel its eyes on my back
  As I cross on that narrow track,
Something that watches me.

It is never bittern, who thumps
  At his hidden churn in the reeds.
  It is never heron, who feeds
In the shallows beside old stumps,

Or spotted bull-frog, who eyes
  Me passing his tiny lake
  Where the great green bubbles break
And the veils of the bog-mists rise.

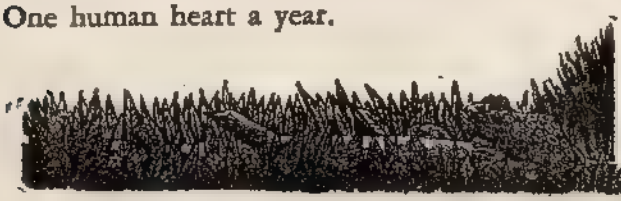
But deeper than long-drowned log
  Something that never sleeps
  Lies crouched in those oozy deeps,
Something as old as the bog. . . .

They say that there was a time
  When Indians called this sod
  "The place of the evil god,"
And prayed to the quivering slime.

They say that a Face would appear
  In the mists that the night-winds brew,
  And would ask for its ancient due:
One human heart a year.

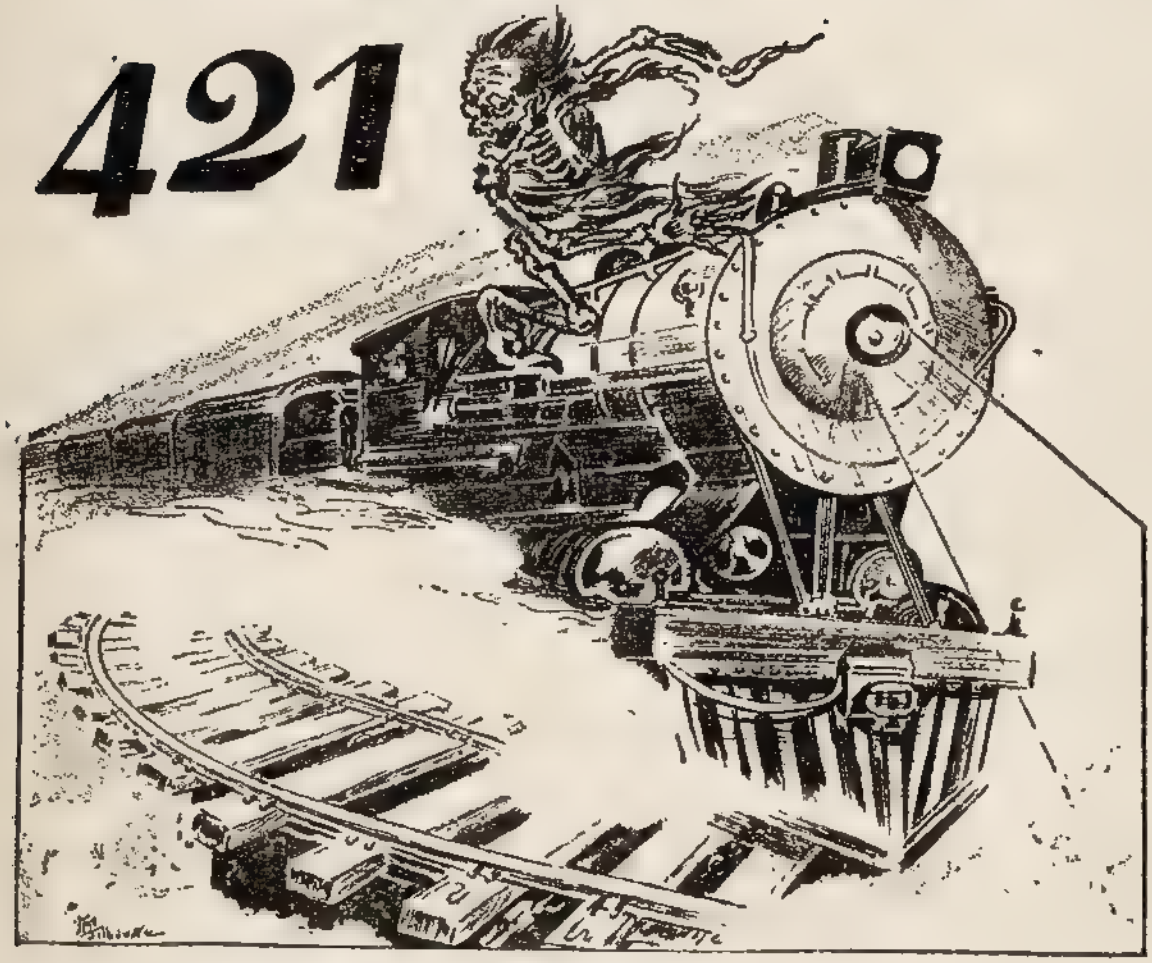
All that is a long-closed book. . . .
  But still, as I pass on that track,
  I feel something's eyes on my back
And I never dare turn to look,

For fear that the mists should spread
  And curdle to mouth and eyes
  Malefic and old and wise,
Demanding Its terrible bread!



Pacific 421

By
AUGUST DERLETH



"JUST to be on the safe side, I wouldn't spend too much time over the hill at the far end of your property," said the agent with an apologetic smile.

Colley took the keys and pocketed them. "That's an odd thing to say. Why not?"

"Around mid-evening especially," continued the agent.

"Oh, come—why not?"

"That's just what I've been told. Something strange there, I'd guess. Give yourself time to become used to the place first."

Albert Colley had every intention of doing that. He had not bought a place in the country just out of a village on the Pacific line without the determination to become used to it before he invited his stepfather

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

There was something more than strange about the end of his property—especially around mid-evening

down— if he could screw up courage enough to have the old curmudgeon around for a week or so. If it were not for the old man's money—well, if it were not for that, and the fact that Albert Colley was his only legal heir, he would have been free of the old man long before this. Even as it was, Philander Colley was a trial that made itself felt in the remotest atom of Albert's being.

Of course, the agent's off-hand reference had been a mistake. Few people, in any case, are qualified to judge just how any given man will act, especially on such short acquaintance as there had been between Colley and the agent for the Parth house two miles out of that Missouri town. Colley was a cool customer, cooler than the agent guessed him to be. Colley apprehended at once that there was something a little strange about the far end of the property he had bought—a good forty-acre piece, with the house right up next to the road in a little clump of trees there, and, as he understood it from that old map in the county surveyor's office, a portion of the Pacific line cutting across the far edge of his property, over a little gully there. From the road and the house, his property stretched through a garden, then through a dense belt of woods to an open place beyond which there was a little knoll, politely called "the hill," and past this, the railroad and the termination of Colley's newly acquired property at the foot of a steeper slope, likewise for the most part wooded.

And, being a cool customer, Colley went that first evening for a tour of exploration, half expecting some denizened beast to spring at him out of the woods, but not afraid, for all that. He walked down to the point where the railroad crossed the trestle over the gully and then turned to look down the tracks, this way and that; the railroad came around a curve, crossed the trestle and the edge of his property, and disappeared around a further curve to westward. He stood for a while on the trestle, smoking a cigar, and taking pleasure in the sound of night-hawks swooping and sky-coasting in the evening sky. He looked at his watch. Almost nine o'clock. Well, that was as close to mid-evening as a man would want, he thought.

He left the trestle and was beginning to walk leisurely back to the house when he heard the whistle and rumble of an approaching locomotive. He turned there on the edge of his woods to look. Yes, it was coming, brightly lit; so he stood and watched the powerful, surging force of the train thunder across the trestle, eight passenger cars streaming speedily along behind the locomotive—*Pacific 421*—on the way to the west coast. Like most men, he had always had a kind of affinity for trains; he liked to see them, ride on them, hear them. He watched this one out of sight and turned.

But at that moment there fell upon his ears the most frightful explosion of sound—a screaming of steel on steel, a splintering of wood, a great rush of steam, the roar of flames crackling, and the shrill, horrible screaming of people in agony. For a moment he was paralyzed with shock; then he realized that the train must have leaped the tracks or crashed into an eastbound train, and, without stopping to think that he ought to telephone for help, he sped back to the tracks and raced down as fast as he could to round the curve of the hill there to westward.

It was just as well that he did not summon help first.

There was nothing, nothing at all on the tracks beyond the curve!

For a moment Colley thought that the train must be found farther along, over the horizon; but that was impossible, for the tracks stretched away under the stars to join a greater network of railroads beyond, and there was nothing whatever on them. The evening train had gone through, and he—well, he had undoubtedly suffered a kind of auditory hallucination. But it jarred him still; for an hallucination, the experience had been shakingly convincing, and it was a somewhat subdued Albert Colley who made his way back along the tracks and into his property once more.

He thought about it all night.

In the morning he might have forgotten it but for the fact that he took a look at the village weekly he had had delivered to his house by the rural postman and his eye caught sight of train schedules; trains leaving for the west on the Pacific line were scheduled at 6:07 and at 11:23. There numbers were different, too—there was no *Pacific 421* among them.

Colley was sharp. He had not been en-

gaged in dubious business practices for some years without becoming shrewd about little matters. It did not take much to figure out that something was very much wrong. He read the railroad schedule over carefully and deliberately, and then got up and took a quick walk down through the garden, through the woods, to the railroad tracks.

Their appearance under the sun was puzzling, to put it mildly. They were rusted and gave every evidence of deterioration under disuse. Wild roses, fox grass, evening primroses, weeds grew between the ties, and bushes climbed the embankment. The ties and the trestle were in good shape, but the fact remained that the railroad did not have the look of being in use. He crossed the trestle and walked for over a mile until he came to the double track which was certainly the main line. Then he walked back until he came to the tracks of the main line far around the slope of the hill on the other side. The cut-off spur across his property was not more than five miles in length, all told.

IT WAS well past noon when he returned to the house. He made himself a light lunch and sat down to think the matter over.

Very peculiar. Then there had been the agent's half-hearted warning. A faint prickling made itself felt at the roots of his scalp, but something turning over in his scheming mind was stronger.

It was Saturday afternoon, or he would have made it a point to drive into the village and call on the agent; but the agent would be out of his office; the trip would be futile. What he could and would do, however, was to walk down through the garden and the woods, over the hill to the railroad embankment in mid-evening and keep an eye out for the *Pacific 421*.

It was not without some trepidation that he made his way through the woods to the railroad that night. He was filled with a certain uneasy anticipation, but he would not yield to his inner promptings to return to the house and forget what he had seen. He took up his stand at the foot of an old cottonwood tree and lit a cigar, the aromatic smoke of which mingled with the pleasant, sweet foliage fragrance to make a pleasant cloud of perfume around him.

As nine o'clock drew near, he grew restive. He looked at his watch several times, but the time passed with execrable slowness. The train was manifestly late.

Nine-fifteen, nine-thirty, nine-forty-five —and at last ten. No train.

Colley was more mystified than ever, and he returned to the house that night determined to repeat his experiment on the morrow.

But on Sunday night he saw no more than he had seen the previous day. No locomotive whistled and roared across the trestle and away around the curve of the hill, drawing its passenger cars, brilliantly alight after it —nothing at all. Only the wind sighed and whispered at the trestle, and a persistent owl hooted from the hillside beyond the ravine bridged by the trestle. Colley was puzzled, and, yes, a little annoyed.

He went into the village on Monday and paid a call on the agent.

"Tell me," he said affably, "doesn't the old *Pacific 421* run out of here any more?"

The agent gave him an odd glance. "Not since the accident. I think even the number's been discontinued. Let me see—the accident took place about seven years ago, when that spur across your land was still part of the main line."

"Oh, it's no longer in use, then?"

"No, it hasn't been for years—ever since the accident." He coughed. "You haven't seen anything, have you?"

IT WAS at this point that Colley made his fatal mistake. He was too clever for his own good. Because his thoughts were several leaps and bounds ahead of the agent's, he said gravely, "No. Why?"

The agent sighed his relief. "Well, some people have laid claim to seeing a ghost there." He laughed. "A ghost train, if you can believe it!"

"Interesting," said Colley dryly, his skin at the back of his neck chilling.

"That wreck occurred on a Friday evening, and it's usually on Friday that the so-called apparition is seen. And then it seems to have its limitations; I've never seen it myself; nor have very many people. I did have the experience of being with someone who claimed to be seeing it. But I never heard of a ghost, man or train, which could be seen and heard by one person and not

by someone standing beside him, did you?"

"Never," agreed Colley gravely.

"Well, there you are. I was afraid you, too, might have seen something. I was just a little nervous about it."

"I suppose that's what you meant."

"Yes. Maybe I shouldn't have said anything."

"No harm done," said Colley, smiling good-naturedly.

HE WAS really not paying much attention to what the agent was saying, for he was busy with his own thoughts. His own thoughts would have been of considerable interest to his stepfather, for they concerned him very much indeed. Philander Colley had a weak heart, and it had occurred to Albert Colley that with a careful build-up and the sudden exposure of the old man to that ghost train some Friday night, the old man's heart might give out on him, and that would leave Albert, as the old man's only heir, in sound financial shape.

He had expected the agent to put the matter more or less as he did. Incredible as it seemed, the idea of a phantom train was not entirely beyond the bounds of possibility. Of course, curiously, Colley did not actually believe in the phantom train as anything supernatural — doubtless there was some kind of scientific explanation for it, he felt, thus betraying a juvenile faith in one kind of superstition as opposed to another. But as long as *something* came rushing along there and wrecked itself, repeating the catastrophe of that Friday evening seven years ago, it might as well be put to his own use. After all, that train, whatever its status, *did* cross his land, and he had a certain proprietary right in it.

Forthwith he wired his stepfather that he had got settled, and the old man might like to come down from his place in Wisconsin and take a look around Colley's place in the Missouri country.

The old man came, with dispatch.

If Albert Colley had his dark side, the old man was cantankerous enough to match his stepson any day, any time, any place. He was the sort of crotchety old devil who would argue about anything under the sun, at scarcely the shadow of a provocation. Small wonder Colley wanted to get rid of him!

Colley lost no time in setting the stage. He told the old man that it was his regular habit to walk down to the end of his property every evening, and would like the old man to accompany him.

Bitterly complaining, the old man went along.

As they approached the railroad tracks—it was Wednesday night, and nothing was likely to happen—Colley coughed unctuously and said that the stretch of abandoned tracks before them had the reputation of being haunted.

"Haunted?" repeated the old man, with a sarcastic laugh. "By what?"

"A train that was wrecked here about seven years ago. *Pacific 421.*"

"Cock and bull story," snapped Philander.

"There *are* people who claim to have seen it."

"Out of their minds. Or drunk. You ought to know what you can see when you're drunk, Albert. I remember that time you saw alligators all over your room."

"Still, you know," said Albert, trying his best to be patient, "one ought not to dismiss such stories too casually. After all, things happen, and science cannot always explain them satisfactorily."

"Things! What things? Optical illusions, hallucinations—such like. No, my boy, you never were very bright in school, but I never thought it would come to this—a belief in ghosts. And what a ghost, to be specific!" He turned on him almost fiercely. "Have you seen it yourself?"

"N-no," faltered Albert.

"Well, then!" snorted the old man.

That ended the conversation about the phantom train for that evening. Albert was just a little disappointed, but not too badly; after all, he must go slowly; the groundwork for Friday night's hoped-for fatal apparition must be laid carefully. What he could not accomplish on Wednesday, he might well be able to do on the following evening. And then, on Friday. . . . Ah, but Friday was still two days away!

SO, ON Thursday evening they walked down to the tracks again. The old man wanted to go out on to the trestle, and there he stood, talking about trestles in Wisconsin from which he had fished as a boy—quite a long time before he had married

Albert's mother. Albert had a hard time bringing the conversation around to the phantom train, and he had hardly mentioned it before the old man cut him off with his customary rudeness.

"Still going on about that ghost train, eh?"

"The fact is, there seems to be some question about the story both ways."

"I should think there would be!" He snorted. "I can't figure out how a sane, normal, healthy young man would want to even think of such drivel, let alone go on about it the way you do."

"Keep an open mind, Philander," said Albert with ill-concealed asperity.

"My mind's been open all my life," retorted the old man. "But not to a lot of silly superstitions and womanish fears."

"I can't recall having expressed fear of any kind," said Albert frigidly.

"No, but you sound like it."

"I'm not in the habit of being afraid of something I've never seen," said Albert.

"Oh, most people are afraid of the dark." He strove to peer through the gloom into the gully. "Tell me—sand or rock on the sides down there?"

"Rock for the most part. The sand's been washed away."

"Look to be some trees growing down there."

"Young ones—just a few."

POOR Albert! He lost ten minutes talking about rocks, trees, declivities, angles, degrees, and erosion of wind as against that of water, and by that time he was almost too exhausted to bring up the subject of the phantom train again. But he strove manfully and came up with a weak question.

"Tell me, Philander—what *would* you do if you saw that train coming at us?"

"That ghost train?"

"Yes, the one some people believe in."

"Why, close my eyes till she went past," said the old man promptly.

"Then you *would* be afraid of it," charged Albert.

"If there were any such thing, you're darn tootin' I would!"

That was something in the way of a hopeful sign, at least, thought Albert, walking slowly back at his stepfather's side. Well, tomorrow night would tell the story. And if somehow it failed, there was always Friday night a week hence. Patience and fortitude, Albert, my boy! he told himself, meanwhile contemplating with pleasure his acquisition of his stepfather's material possessions. He resolved to time their visit with the utmost care tomorrow night.

All that day he went out of his way to be nice to the old man, on the theory that those who are about to die deserve such little pleasures as it is possible to give; and he was unnaturally ready to forgive the old man his cantankerousness and irritability—which startled Philander because it was an attitude for which Albert never won any medals. If the old man had not been so selfish himself, he might have thought about this change in his stepson; but he opined that perhaps Albert was in need of money and was about to make a touch, and took pleasure for hours thinking up ways in which to rebuff Albert.

As for Albert, he grew hourly more elated as that fateful Friday passed on its way. Time went heavy-footed, but Albert could be patient. After all, Philander's money drew closer moment by moment, and it was of proportions worth waiting for, even if the old man were not exactly what a man might call "rich."

For some reason, all the signs were auspicious. That is to say, along about mid-afternoon, the old man began to recall tales of hauntings he had heard in his youth, and waxed quite garrulous. Albert considered this virtually a sign from—well, not heaven, of course; heaven would hardly be giving him a green light. Anyway, it was a sign, a kind of portent that all was destined to happen as Albert planned it.

SO THAT evening he gave Philander one of his best cigars, lit it for him jovially, and set out with him for the railroad tracks. He had had a few moments of ghastly fear that the old man might not accompany him, but there was no stopping him. He had in fact taken over Albert's little walk, and called it his "constitutional."

"This is the night, you know, that ghost train is said to appear," said Albert cautiously.

"Friday, eh?"

"Yes, it was on Friday that the accident took place."

"Funny thing—how methodical ghosts and suchlike can be, eh?"

Albert agreed, and then very subtly, according to plan, discredited the entire narrative, from beginning to end. It would not do to appear too gullible, when the old man knew very well he was not.

He had hoped they might be able to take up a stand at the edge of the woods, so that Philander might get the best possible view and the maximum shock at sight of that speeding spectre, but the old man insisted upon walking further. Indeed, he ventured out upon the embankment, he walked along the tracks, he even crossed the trestle. This was not quite in accordance with Albert's plans, but he had to yield to it; he followed his stepfather across the trestle, observing in some dismay that the hour must be close to nine.

Even as he thought this, the sound of a thin, wailing whistle burst upon his ears, and almost immediately thereafter came the rumble of the approaching train. Ahead of them the light of the locomotive swung around and bore down on them; it was the ghost train, rushing at them with the speed of light, it seemed, with kind of demoniac violence wholly in keeping with the shattering end to which it was destined to come.

Even in the sudden paroxysm of fright that struck him, Albert did not forget to act natural; this was as he had planned it—to pretend he saw nothing; all he did was to step off the tracks to one side. Then he turned to look at his stepfather. What he saw filled him with complete dismay.

The old man stood in the middle of the right-of-way relighting his cigar. Not a hair of his head had turned, and his eyes were not closed. Yet he appeared to be gazing directly at the approaching train. Albert remembered with sickening chagrin that the agent had said many people could not see the train.

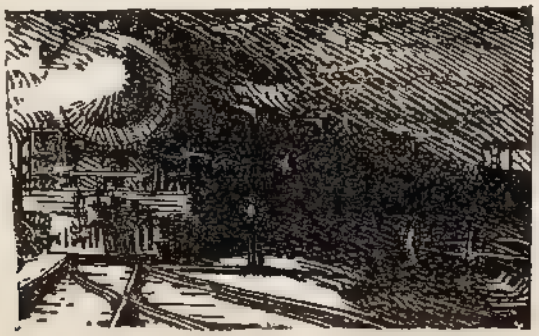
But if Philander Colley could not see the spectral train, he was nevertheless not immune. For at the moment that the phantom locomotive came into contact with the material person of the old man, Philander was knocked up and catapulted into the gully with terrific force, while the agent of his disaster went on its destined way, its lighted coaches streaming by, vanishing around the hill, and ending up, as before in a horrific din of wreckage.

Albert had to take a minute or two to collect himself. Then he ran as best he could down the slope to where his stepfather lay.

Philander Colley was very thoroughly dead. He had been crushed and broken—just as if he had been struck by a locomotive! Albert did not give him a second thought; however it had been done, Philander's end had been accomplished. He set off at a rapid trot for the car to run into the village and summon help.

Unfortunately for Albert Colley, the villagers were wholly devoid of imagination. A ghost train, indeed! There was plenty of evidence from Wisconsin that Albert Colley and his stepfather had not got along at all well. And Albert was the old man's only heir, too! An open and shut matter, in the opinion of the officials.

If there were any such thing as a phantom train, why hadn't Albert Colley said something about it before? The agent could testify he had not. It was plain as a pikestaff that Albert had beaten up the old man and probably pushed him off the trestle. With commendable dispatch Albert Colley was arrested, tried, and hanged.



Sorcery from Thule

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Bad magic is the province of the issintoks—they who turn themselves into animals and kill from a distance

Jon. You tremble—with Arctic cold?
Thorwald. With Arctic fear.
—POG ABROSTO, *The Baresarks.*
(Trans. by Leon Minshall)

JOHN THUNSTONE'S dinner guest was not the most remarkable person he had ever entertained in public, but almost. John Thunstone introduced him to the

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

Countess Montesecco, to Verna Hesseldine and to the head waiter of Whiteside's as Mr. Ipsu, and Mr. Ipsu acknowledged all courtesies in a quiet voice, with an accent not immediately classifiable, even in Times Square. He was of medium height and slender build, so that he seemed a child beside the massive Thunstone. His dinner clothes had surely been tailored in Europe. His face was square and pleasant and the color of a well-roasted fowl, so that his white teeth seemed whiter by contrast. His narrow, bright-black eyes had an almost hypnotic directness. One decided that he might be Levantine, or Polynesian, or Punjabi; then decided that he was none of the three.

They had a cocktail before dinner, at a table not too far from the music, and Mr. Ipsu dispelled the mystery. "By vocation I am a sort of religious leader," he told the ladies. "By inclination, I am a student. By race, I am an Eskimo."

"The first I ever met," announced Verna Hesseldine, who had met most classes and peoples apt to turn up at Whiteside's. "Do you like New York, Mr. Ipsu?"

The black eyes and the white teeth smiled. Ipsu looked at Thunstone, who was telling the waiter how he wanted the soup seasoned, then at the Countess, and back at Miss Hesseldine. "Ask me that in thirty years. I don't know now."

"You never dreamed of such a place in Greenland," she suggested.

"No, though I've not lived always in Greenland. I attended the university at Copenhagen, and studied later at Stockholm and Edinburgh. I've acted in two motion pictures, and lectured to women's clubs in Los Angeles and Montreal and Chicago. All this as part of the study of the world that I felt a good *angekok* should make."

"*Angekok,*" repeated the Countess uncertainly. Mr. Ipsu smiled.

"Every Eskimo community has an *angekok,* and white explorers call him a magician, a medicine man, a priest, a soothsayer, a fourflusher—a variety of things." The smile became apologetic. "I can't translate the term myself. But *angekoks* are necessary. Arctic life is so hard as to be almost impossible, yet Eskimos have lived and flourished and developed their own culture since the beginning of time. I venture to say that we *angekoks* help to make their lives livable."

"How?" asked Miss Hesseldine. "Magic?" She turned to Thunstone. "John, I know you study and do amazing things, but do you believe—"

"Dear lady," broke in Ipsu gently, "I claim nothing, I only wonder and work. My people must have guidance in hunting, in travel, in a hundred labors and adventures against the cold and the snow. They ask me what happens ten days' journey away, or a week in the future, and I try to oblige. I turn out right more often than not. Or there is sickness or peril. I enter the *quaggi* —the singing-house, you might call it, though we do more there than sing. I do and say and think certain formulas. Perhaps I succeed."

A little silence. The waiter brought hors d'oeuvres.

"Excuse me if I say the wrong thing," ventured Verna Hesseldine, "but how can an educated and travelled man seriously say—"

She paused, and Mr. Ipsu smiled again.

"Dear lady, I was bred and seasoned in my faith, as you in yours. The nature of reality is my whole goal of search, and I have only begun. On the shores of the ocean of knowledge, I gather a few pebbles, but they have substance and shape and reality."

"You must be a worthwhile person, Mr. Ipsu," said Miss Hesseldine. John here studies magic and the supernatural, and he wouldn't consort with you if you were a bad —what is the word again?—if you were a bad *angekok.*"

"Oh," and he took some spiced sausage, "the very term *angekok* means good magic. If we fail to do good, it's only because we bungle. Bad magic," and he grew somber, "is the province of the *issintoks.*"

"Are they powerful, as the *angekoks* are?" asked the Countess.

"They are powerful in a different way. They consort with bad spirits—even Sedna, who rules the Night Land. They turn themselves into strange, unpleasant animals. They kill from a distance, by words I would never, never say."

THEN he smiled and made a deprecatory gesture. "But this is boresome, ladies. I speak of savage superstitions, and of my stupid, clumsy self. I am ashamed to show such poor manners."

"Oh, we want to hear," protested both women, but Ipsu shook his gleaming black head.

"That you consent to sit with me is more than honor enough. I come from a stone-age people. The things I speak about are too ridiculous to interest you. Please," he said to John Thunstone, "ask them to forgive me."

Verna Hesseldine coughed. "If I've offended you, I'm sorry."

"Offend me?" repeated Ipsu. "I would not presume to be offended. I know that I have fatigued you with my drivel about Eskimo myths."

Thunstone understood. Ipsu, like all well-bred Eskimo gentlemen, was being formally modest and abasing himself. He had been taught that conceit was worse than torture or death. Thunstone tried to approach the little crisis.

"Ipsu," he said, "I haven't been to your country, but I've read the books—Freuchen, Dr. Kane, and the others—who went there and who had the sense to observe your customs. Remember that you're in my land now. Do as the Romans do."

Ipsu brightened. "If you truly want to hear—"

"We do," Verna Hesseldine assured him eagerly. "Tell us about the *issintoks,* the evil sorcerers."

"This far from where they work, I may speak," began Ipsu, and once again broke off.

His mouth hung open, then closed with a sudden grinding of teeth. His eyes started, his hand flew to the front of his dinner jacket and came away with blood on the fingers.

"You're hurt!" cried the Countess.

Thunstone was on his feet. The waiter hurried forward, goggling.

"Accident," said Thunstone. "Where may I take my friend?"

The waiter led him to the lounge. Ipsu staggered as he tried to follow, and Thunstone lifted him like a kitten, hurrying him along. Laying Ipsu on a couch, he pulled open the coat and shirt.

Ipsu's brown skin was gashed, just to the left of the breastbone. Recovering a bit, he studied the place. "There *is* one here," he said shakily. "John, that was done by—"

The manager of Whiteside's was telephoning for a doctor. Thunstone took a clean napkin from the waiter, and wadded it into a compress.

"By rights," said Ipsu, "I should be dead. Look in my waistcoat pocket, on the left side."

Thunstone drew a flat cigarette case of silver from Ipsu's pocket. At its center appeared a jagged hole, as if a hard, rough point had been jammed through it. Ipsu studied it.

"The *issintok* spear." His voice had grown stronger. "Driven for the heart, but blocked away. Isn't your temperate-zone magic full of references to silver as a protection? Please ask the ladies to excuse us. I was wrong to be coy. I must tell you much about *angekok* and *issintok* and the battle between them—battle which now opens on the New York front."

WHEN the doctor came, he spoke about slight flesh wounds and nervous shocks, and went away puzzled. Later, lying on the cot in his little hotel room, Ipsu talked.

"I need not persuade you how well enchantments work, John. An *angekok* might use the spell to kill remote game for his hungry brothers, but an *issintok* uses it against human enemies. It calls for preparation by fasting and chanting, then prayer to spirits of good or evil, according to the good or evil of the wish. Finally, rushing to the door of the *quaggi,* you strike out into the night with a certain spear, of peculiar name and history. It comes back covered with hot blood. The stricken beast or man is later found stabbed to the heart, unless, of course—" He picked up the damaged silver case, and regarded it gratefully.

"Why should it be less possible that radio devices that show the position of a far-off ship, which is then smashed by shells fired from beyond the horizon?" said Thunstone. "But who, Ipsu? Who would want to kill you, and who would know how?"

"The only *issintok* whom I ever challenged," said Ipsu slowly, "lived far north of Etah in Greenland. He and I had a contest of magic. It would have interested you, I think. When he was shown to be the weaker for that time, his followers turned on him and drove him from the tribe. . . . Wait!" Ipsu sat up. "He is an exile. Perhaps far from Greenland. He, too, had studied

among civilized peoples—can it be that he has come here?"

"What was his name? Would the police be interested?"

"His name was Kumak. If he continued as he began, police would want him badly. But do me a favor by leaving this to me."

Thunstone bowed his head in agreement. Ipsu swung his feet to the floor and slid them into shoes. He buttoned a fresh shirt over his bandaged chest. "Kumak," he said again. "He knew how to find me, and I shall know how to find him." He pointed to the corner of the room. "My side is sore. Will you lift the small suitcase to the bureau-top? And open it?"

It was done. Ipsu took from the suitcase a small roundish parcel, the size of his fist. Carefully he unwrapped it and revealed a pitted stone, like a lump of slag from a furnace, then laid it carefully on a table.

Thunstone stooped to examine. "Meteorite."

"Do not touch it. A *tornaq*—a rock-spirit lives there."

"I've read of the belief. Aren't the strongest of the *tornait* in big boulders?"

"Those with small homes may be the shrewder because of their smallness," replied Ipsu sententiously. He took something else from his case, a carved bone that Thunstone could not identify as being either human or from any animal he knew. This Ipsu laid beside the meteorite, and looked at Thunstone.

"If you stay to listen, please do not move or speak. Sit yonder in the corner." Ipsu dropped into a chair before the table, and drew his feet up under him, Eskimo fashion. Softly he began to sing, a minor tune reminiscent of old, old Chinese flute-music:

"Amna-aya! Amna-aya!"

Thunstone, watching from where he sat, saw a shadowy movement. The little meteorite had stirred, was sliding or turning. It rolled slowly over, as if impelled by an invisible lever. It joggled the bone toward Ipsu's hand, and he took it up.

"The *tornaq* empowers the bone," he said to Thunstone. "It will guide me. If you wish to come—"

Thunstone's car was parked outside. As they drove, Ipsu held the bone between his brown palms, and it twitched once or twice, like the willow rod with which dowsers claim to find hidden water or gold. They drove across town. *"Ja mua,"* muttered Ipsu. "Turn to the right." Several blocks toward lower Manhattan, and: *Ana*—right again. The little brown shop front there ahead. *Obaba*—stop!"

ON THE door was a sign proclaiming the building to be a zoological laboratory. They entered a dim, old-fashioned room like a shop, where a gray-haired man in a smock was wrapping up something. The customer who waited was as brown as Ipsu, but heavy and coarse-featured. To Thunstone he looked somehow like unfinished handiwork. Whatever creator had fashioned him should have spent another hour or so at it. . . .

"Kumak," Ipsu greeted softly, and the fat face turned toward them. Slant, narrow eyes glowed in recognition.

"You know me, Ipsu," ventured the man, bowing jerkily. "I am flattered that a decent person speaks to me."

Ipsu, too, bowed, like a mandarin. "It is you, Kumak, who lower yourself by recognizing me. His eyes were calculating. "You have been living in New York? You are a friend of New Yorkers?"

"Oh," protested Kumak, "nobody notices me. I am so ugly and low that no sensible man would give me his attention. You are the first to grant me a word in many days."

Kumak's eyes shifted to Thunstone. Ipsu made a gesture of introduction. "My friend, though I am not worthy to call him that. John Thunstone."

"You have named him only to make a fool of me," complained Kumak, fidgeting. "I am so stupid and poorly brought up that I have never learned to speak. I am contemptible before this great American." He studied Thunstone more closely, as if wondering where a weapon might strike. The man in the smock offered the package, and Kumak gave him money.

"Where do you live, Kumak?" asked Ipsu.

Kumak shook his head. "You know I do not dare tell a great *angekok* my wretched dwelling. It is the filthiest and most uncomfortable room in New York. Even to speak the address would be to give offense." Kumak bowed once more, and shuffled out.

Thunstone had listened in utter fascination. This was Eskimo formality, the ritual-

istic humility that constituted polite discourse in the Arctic wilds. If it was ever so slightly more extravagant than usual, that meant that the two were being extra alert, extra cautious of each other. Ipsu was staring after Kumak. Thunstone turned to the proprietor.

"What did he buy from you?"

The man stared, a little hostile, and from his pocket Thunstone drew a small shiny badge.

"Police?" asked the man.

"Of a sort. What did he buy?"

"Venom. Snake venom." A lean old finger pointed to a wire cage on a shelf, where dozed a great coiled rattlesnake. "He had an introduction from someone at the university—"

"Come with me," said Thunstone to Ipsu, "and talk. It seems as if your *issintok* friend will make a new try with the spear that didn't kill you."

They went back to the car.

"Poison, in the slightest of wounds, should succeed," said Thunstone.

"Succeed against us both," nodded Ipsu. Kumak knows that you are with me in the matter, John. You will be attacked, too—perhaps first, perhaps second. Quick, back to the room. We must do more magic of our own, and do it first."

AT IPSU'S quarters, the two went quickly to work, pushing all furniture to the walls. Ipsu produced a little soapstone lamp, full of hard-congealed fat. Turning out the electric lights, he kindled the crudely twisted wick of dried moss. A dim glow, pale-brown in color, flickered up, casting strange shadows.

"This room must serve as our *quaggi*," he announced. "Sit opposite me on the floor."

Squatting, Ipsu held up something else, a piece of dry, untanned sealskin. It gave out a whisper of crackly sound. "Shake this in rhythm for me. I must call a spirit—a strong spirit—"

"A good spirit, of course?"

"I hope it is a good one," replied Ipsu cryptically, and thrust the patch of skin into Thunstone's hand.

Thunstone began to shake it. It rustled gently, like marching feet in distant dead grass. The light began to die down, gradually and steadily, and finally winked out, as if a thumb and finger had pinched the flame from the wick. The last flicker showed Ipsu, squatting on his heels with knees on the floor, arms extended and hands tight clasped, face raised a little.

From somewhere rose a vibrating cry, deep and musical, like the blast of a bass horn. It changed to a wheezing, hissing note. Still shaking the skin in rhythm as Ipsu had directed, Thunstone experimentally held the breath that was in his own great lungs. He kept it stubbornly pent up until his head swam and his eyes stung. At last he breathed out because he must, and at once gulped fresh air and held it until he was forced to breathe a second time. Not once in that time did the prolonged hiss break off, or even quaver. It seemed long minutes before it went silent.

"Stop now," said a voice in the darkness that must be Ipsu's. "Full silence."

The dim-seen squatting figure opposite Thunstone collapsed where it was, lying on the floor like a corpse.

Thunstone laid down the rustling skin. Carefully, silently, he leaned forward to touch Ipsu's outflung arm.

Ipsu's wrist was slack and chill. Thunstone could feel no pulse. When he let go the wrist, it fell like a clod to the boards. Thunstone bent closer, feeling for Ipsu's heart. It, too, did not stir.

The *angekok*, then, had died. Kumak's magic—what else?—had stricken him in the very midst of his defense conjuration.

Thunstone got to his feet. His groping hand found the table against the wall, and his fingers touched something—the carved bone that Ipsu had used as a guide to Kumak. Thunstone picked it up. It was as warm as a living thing, and seemed to quiver between his great fingers. Thunstone remembered what Ipsu had said of the *tornaq*, the rock-spirit. Would it lead again to the enemy? As if in response to his thought, the bone stirred more strongly in his grasp.

Thunstone tiptoed to the door and went out, hatless and coatless. He did not look back at the limp, quiet form of his prostrate friend. Downstairs he got into his car. With one hand he started the motor, shifted gears, and with one hand he steered away from the curb. The bone, close held in his other hand,

made a little throbbing leap to the right. Obediently Thunstone turned at the next corner, turned again when the bone indicated a change of direction.

He rolled past the laboratory where Kumak had bought snake venom. It was two blocks further on that the bone seemed to press backward against his palm, and he braked to a halt. As he got out, he felt his guide tugging toward a doorway between two flights of stone steps.

Kumak must live there. Kumak had killed Ipsu, would kill others. Kumak had best die himself. Thunstone, who from time to time had done considerable killing of his own and always with the clearest of conscience, put the bone in his vest pocket. His broad, heavy shoulders hunched, as if ready to put power back of a blow.

THE lock of the door was simple and old. The first of the skeleton keys on the bunch Thunstone carried opened the door. Inside was a narrow, shabby hallway, with a row of doors on each side. The door-jambs bore cards, lettered in pen and ink. He looked at the names in turn. Travers. Lorenzen. McCoy. Kumak.

His fingers touched the brass knob, and it was icy cold.

He paused a moment, even then, to ponder the connection between thoughts of evil and thoughts of the Arctic. Lovecraft, who wrote and thought as no other man about supernatural horror, was forever commenting upon the chill, physical and spiritual, of wickedness and baleful mystery. The ancients had believed in whole nations of warlocks to the far north—Thule and Hyperborea. Iceland and Lapland had been synonyms for magic. Where did one find the baleful lycanthrope most plentiful? In frozen Siberia. Why do natives dare not scale the snowy crests of the Himalayas? For fear of the abominable ice-demons. Death's hand is icy. The Norseman's inferno is a place of utter dark and sleet.

He opened the door.

Kumak had spoken truth when he said that his living quarters were wretched. The little cube of a room was painted in sad, rusty colors. The carpetless floorboards were worn and uneven. Like Ipsu's hotel chamber, it had been lighted by a stone lamp from the Arctic, now burning low. In the center of the floor lay a coiled ring of rawhide rope—that would be the mystic doing of the *issintok*, the opening into the world of spirits. And the spear with which death could be dealt afar was now in Kumak's hand.

Kumak, stripped to his undershirt and trousers, looked shiny with sweat. He held the weapon with its butt on the floor and its point upward, at a level with his pudgy shoulder. The spear-haft was of dark, well-seasoned wood, and the head was a full foot in length, pale yellow in color, fluted and twisted to the tapering point. Thunstone knew what it was. The ancients would take it for the horn of a unicorn, capable of any magic. In reality it was the ivory tusk of a norwahl.

From a small bottle Kumak was anointing the tip. He sang to himself, softly and tremulously, a song of Eskimo enchantment.

Then his magic was not complete. Why had Ipsu died?"

"Kumak," said Thunstone.

KUMAK looked up. His eyes were no longer narrow, but bulged and stared. They were full of green lights, like the eyes of a meat-eating animal.

"You think I cannot kill him," muttered Kumak. "The shadows from Sedna ripen. He shall die. But you—you die first."

He faced Thunstone and poised the spear for a throw or a stab. His ungainly body seemed to take on a dangerous grace, the grace of the trained hunter who knows the gear with which he deals death. A drop of moisture on the ivory tip gleamed in the moonlight. That would be the rattlesnake venom. A scratch would be enough to kill. Thunstone set himself to repel any rush.

"You die first," repeated Kumak. "Then Ipsu, when the shadows lead my thrust to his heart."

He moved a step forward. His foot planted itself close to the coil of cord upon the floor.

Then it was that Thunstone saw a bit of movement on the cord. It seemed that a knot, a large knot, tied itself among the strands; a knot that was strangely intricate, and seemed to tighten steadily. It was a brown knot and tense, shaped like a fist.

No, not like a fist. For it was a fist.

A brown hand had come up from within

the coil and was clinging there, as to the rim of a manhole.

"I shall kill you," promised Kumak. "I shall thrust you through the heart, then through the arms and legs, so that you cannot walk or hunt in the Spirit Country. And with this spear I shall slash the skin from your brow over your eyes, so that your spirit cannot see."

The hand rose, and after it an arm. It caught Kumak by the ankle, and twitched him from his feet.

Kumak opened his writhing mouth and would have howled, but what whipped out of the circle of rope was too quick for him. Another hand was on his mouth, a sinewy brown body, stark naked, flung itself upon him to hold him down. There was a struggle for the spear.

Thunstone stood where he was, and watched. The naked brown attacker was blurred at the edges of its silhouette, like the memory of an acquaintance. The memory of Ipsu.

THE two grapplers struggled to their feet. The spear was between them, but with a sudden effort the Ipsu-thing wrenched it away. There came a darting stroke, the abrupt, heavy sound of a blow striking deep into flesh. Ipsu's image stepped back.

Kumak stood wavering. The haft of the spear jutted from his panting chest. The norwahl tusk, no longer ivory-pale but red, stood out between his shoulders. He thudded down on his face. Ipsu's dark eyes and white teeth flashed a smile at Thunstone. Then the naked figure slipped, feet first and swifter than a diving seal, back into the ring of cord. It sank from sight.

Thunstone stepped across to look. Within the rawhide circle there was only floor, bare and solid. He turned, strode across the still twitching body of Kumak, and departed the way he had come.

Back at the hotel he had something else to stare at.

The electric light was turned on in Ipsu's room, the furniture pulled back into place, and all the properties of Eskimo magic stowed out of sight. On the bureau stood a tray of sandwiches and a pot of coffee from the grill downstairs. Ipsu sat in his shirt sleeves on the edge of the cot, biting hungrily into bread and meat. He smiled again at Thunstone, as the entity in Kumak's room had smiled.

"I believe you expected to find me dead," he greeted his friend.

"You were dead," replied Thunstone. "I touched your body, and there was no pulse nor heart beat."

"I was only sleeping very soundly," explained Ipsu. "A trance—any one of several hundred New York mediums can go into one. Will you have a sandwich? Next you'll claim that you saw my disembodied spirit in Kumak's room."

"Indeed I did see it," Thunstone assured him. "I thought—"

"That my ghost was taking vengeance? It was. But I had not died. I simply left my body for a short time and went to do what must be done. Since Kumak had made his rope-coil—the doorway to the Spirit Country—it was doubly easy to reach him. Don't stare, John. *Angekoks* can do these things."

Thunstone sat down and drew in his breath. He was perspiring.

"I might expect strange things from Eskimo magic," he said at last. "Night, when magic is strongest, lasts six months at a time up near the pole."

"Yet six months is only half of the year," reminded Ipsu, pouring coffee. "Snow—clean, white snow—is there forever. White is more lasting and more universal than black in the Eskimo land. Therefore magic of good can be stronger than magic of evil."

Thunstone shook his head. "What I have seen is so strange, even to me—"

"But what did you see?" Ipsu demanded. "Don't you think it was only your imagination? You rate me too highly. I am no real *angekok*. I am not capable of using the wisdom of my people."

"No more of your Eskimo false modesty," begged Thunstone. "I don't think I can endure it just now."

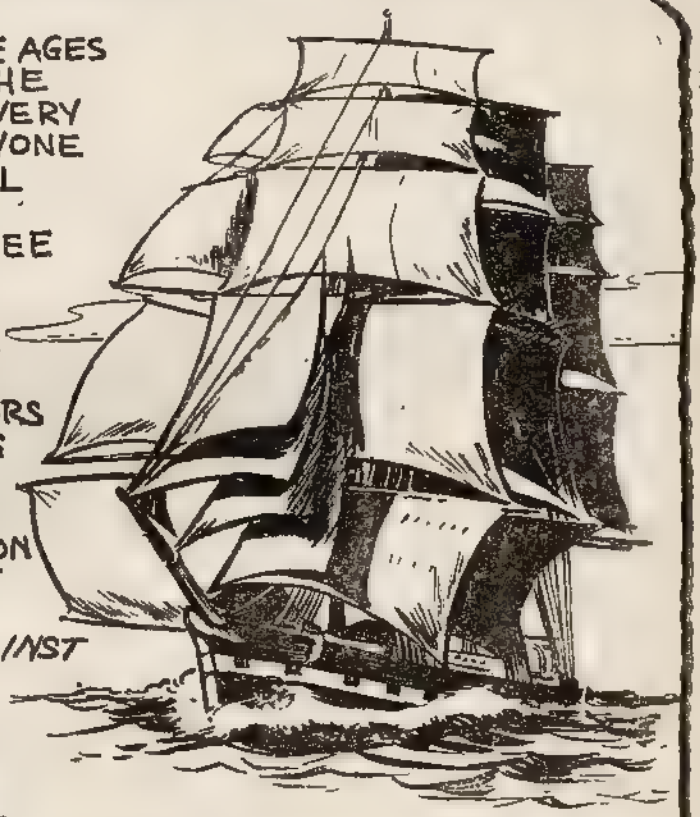
"Just hokus-pokus and trickery, and maybe some self-induced hypnotism in us and in Kumak," went on Ipsu stubbornly. "John, you ascribe intelligence and courage to me, and I have none of either. I am only the most stupid and ugly of my people, on whom you take pity. Shall we talk of something that is fit to interest grown men?"

Again he offered the sandwiches. And winked.

SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS

by Will

IN THE PRIMITIVE AGES OF THE CHURCH, THE SUPERSTITION WAS VERY PREVALENT THAT ANYONE BORN WITH A CAUL WOULD LEAD A FORTUNATE LIFE FREE FROM DANGER! AT ONE TIME CHILDREN'S CAULS WERE ADVERTISED FOR SALE TO SAILORS AND OTHERS GOING ON LONG SEA VOYAGES, AS IT WAS BELIEVED POSSESSION OF ONE *WOULD BE AN INFALLIBLE PRESERVATIVE AGAINST* **DROWNING!**



IT WAS ONCE BELIEVED THAT AT THE TIME OF COCK-CROWING THE MIDNIGHT SPIRITS FORSOOK THESE LOWER REGIONS, AND WENT TO THEIR PROPER PLACES! TO VENTURE ABROAD SOONER WAS CONSIDERED *TO RISK ENCOUNTER WITH A* **GHOST!**

The Wayward Skunk

By HAROLD LAWLOR

THOUGH it was raining and he was wet and uncomfortable, it was springtime in the heart of Henry Hildreth. For Henry Hildreth, curator of the Forest Refuge Museum, was in love—a blissful state which, like the comedy relief in a tragic play, was to sharpen the horror of the fantastic adventure so soon to befall him.

As he scuffled through the wet leaves, stopping occasionally to wipe the raindrops from his thick bifocals, Henry's face was wreathed in happy smiles.

"Eileen, my adored one!" he said aloud. Then he ducked his head bashfully. No, that sounded too stilted. He cleared his throat and squared his narrow shoulders manfully. "Eileen, I love you! Oh, sweetheart! Oh, darling! Oh—"

"Nuts!" a voice said querulously.

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

You may love animals, but don't ever let a lovesick lady skunk attach herself to you! Here's why . . .

Henry jumped a foot, his eyes rolling like two beans in a barrel. He was in a little clearing in the sodden woods. There was no one in sight, and nothing but a tiny bush beside him, too small for anyone to hide behind. Nevertheless, Henry parted its branches and saw two little eyes glaring balefully up at him, two little shoulders hunched dejectedly above a small round body.

It was a skunk.

Now Henry had a heart full of love for all animals. On this late afternoon he was making his second and final trip of the day through the forest, on the *qui vive* for any unfortunate animals he might find in need of succor. And he wouldn't draw the line even at a skunk.

Henry stuttered, "Are—are you hurt?"

"No," said the skunk. "Just demned demp, moist, and uncomfortable."

"Well, we'll soon fix *that* up—" Henry began heartily. Then he did a delayed double-take. "Say, are you *talking* to me?"

"Who do you think I'm talking to?" said the skunk fretfully.

"But—but *skunks* can't talk!" Henry objected.

"A fat lot you know," sneered the skunk.

HENRY took off his hat and wiped his forehead. It was wet, but not solely from the rain. Maybe he'd been alone in the woods too much. Maybe he was going crazy.

"Look," he said earnestly, determined to settle this thing right now. "Parrots can talk. Even crows, maybe, but—"

"If they can do it, why not I?" asked the skunk, with a despondent sneeze.

Well, it sounded reasonable enough. Perhaps there was a flaw in the argument some place, but if so, Henry couldn't quite seem to put his finger on it. In a daze, he bent down and lifted the furry little black-and-white body. He hurried back to the Museum, hoping the skunk wouldn't misbehave itself before they reached there. But it didn't. He might have been carrying a scentless rose. The only thing Henry noticed was that the skunk seemed to be—well, almost *snuggling* up to him. And the soft light in its eyes, when it was dry and warm and perched on the middle of Henry's desk, made Henry definitely nervous. There was something alarmingly amorous about it.

"What's your name?" Henry babbled, desperately making conversation. "Shall I call you Tommy?"

"Ye gods, no!" said the skunk, looking at him pityingly. Now that it was comfortable again, the animal's self-esteem seemed to be rising in leaps and bounds.

"Why not?" Could this be he, Henry Hildreth, holding this fantastic conversation with a skunk. "Why not?"

" 'Cause I'm a lady skunk, 'at's why," sniffed the skunk. "Furthermore, I have a name. "It's Stinkilyn. Stinkie, to my dearest friends . . . and to *you-oo*."

And she fluttered her eyelashes at him.

This appalling sight sent Henry reeling to the corner sink for a long cold drink of water. Still unstrung, he tottered back.

"Wouldn't you like to go back to the forest now, Stinkilyn?" Henry coaxed anxiously. He couldn't stand much more of this.

"No," Stinkie pouted. "I like it here. I want to stay near you."

"Why?" Henry was vaguely alarmed.

"Because I love you," Stinkie cooed. "You're such a kind-hearted slob."

Henry would have staggered over for another glass of water. But somehow he knew that all the water in the world wouldn't help him now. He wasn't a drinking man, by nature, but he wished—

As if she read his mind, Stinkilyn put a small forepaw against her chest and then coughed. "You haven't got a spot of gin around here anywheres, have you pal? My lungs, you know. Delicate. Delicate as all hell." She coughed again, her little eyes brightly expectant.

"Certainly not!" Henry said righteously. And he fancied she looked disappointed. A suspicion reared its ugly head in Henry's mind. Could Stinkilyn have been a gangster skunk's moll? She talked like it. She acted like it. And there was a certain reckless, devil-may-care glitter in her eye that made Henry think she even looked like it.

But before he could put the question to her, the telephone bell trilled.

It was Eileen, ripping mad. "Henry, do you know what time it is? I thought you were taking me to the 'Glass Slipper'!"

"Oh, Eileen, it's you, darling," Henry faltered. Stinkie was tugging at his elbow distractingly, making conversation difficult. "Go 'way!" he hissed, aside.

"What!" Eileen said.

"I'm talking to a skunk," Henry said hastily.

"What!" Eileen said.

"Not you, darling," Henry moaned. "Stinkilyn."

"Henry, you've been drinking!" Eileen said. "I'm coming right over."

Stinkie gave Henry a vicious jab. "Is Eileen the one you were drooling about in the woods? Tell her if she shows her face around here, I'll cut her heart out."

"Did you hear me, Henry?" Eileen repeated. "I'm coming right over."

Henry hesitated.

"Just bear in mind what I said," Stinkie said darkly.

Henry shuddered.

"Who's there with you?" Eileen asked suspiciously.

"No one, dear," Henry said quickly. "Look, honey, you'd better not come over. I'll — I'll meet you — somewhere — some time—"

"Shut up!" Eileen said. And the receiver clicked in Henry's ear. Eileen was a girl who knew when to be firm. She was also, Henry remembered nervously, the jealous type.

He pushed the phone away from him and regarded Stinkie with eyes that were meant to be menacing. "She's coming over anyway. If you harm her, I'll—I'll—"

"You won't do a thing," Stinkie sneered, prolonging the vowels unpleasantly.

"Why won't I?"

"Because I've still got an ace or two up my sleeve," Stinkie said complacently. And she put her thumb to her nose and wiggled her fingers at him.

It was a revolting sight. Henry thought he'd never seen such a depraved skunk. They sat in moody silence until Eileen's arrival.

SHE must have taken a cab over, she appeared so quickly. She was all the way into Henry's study before he even knew she was there.

Eileen was a very pretty girl. Henry loved her dusky curls, her cute little pushed-up nose, her big blue eyes. And Eileen loved Henry, which was a constant source of amazement to all their friends. Once one, braver than the rest, had asked her what she saw in Henry. To which she'd replied thoughtfully, "Women in love are fools." Even Henry had thought her explanation both terse and plausible.

"Henry, are you all right?" she asked now, peering suspiciously into the gloom of his office.

Henry hurried over to her. "Darling!" He kissed her with a lingering warmth. Too lingering.

"C'mon, break it up, break it up!" Stinkilyn snarled from the desk-top.

They jerked apart. Eileen stared over at the skunk, and back at Henry.

"Henry, do I look all right?" she asked anxiously.

"Certainly, my dear. You were never lovelier."

Eileen didn't appear convinced. "Henry, you know—funny thing!—I could have sworn that skunk spoke to us!"

"What's so funny about that?" Stinkie asked truculently.

Eileen passed a hand over her forehead. "I—I think maybe I'd better sit down. I—I feel—sort of funny."

Henry led her over to a chair with tender solicitude. From the desk, Stinkilyn eyed them both malevolently.

"There, there, you'll be all right." Henry patted Eileen's shoulder cautiously. "We'll go to the 'Glass Slipper,' and—"

Eileen nodded weakly. "Maybe with a few under my belt—" Her voice trailed vaguely away.

"Come," Henry said, and helped her to her feet.

There was a commotion from the desk. Stinkie was stamping her hind feet in a towering passion. "You're not walking out on me!" she screamed. "I'm going, too!"

"Oh, no, you're not!" Henry said.

"The hell I ain't!" Stinkie said ungrammatically. She turned her back on them. They could see one small bright eye regarding them wickedly from over her shoulder. "Make one move to leave and I'm going to—"

Eileen screamed. "Henry! If you let that nasty little beast—!"

Henry surrendered hastily. "All right, Stinkilyn, you win. You can come."

Stinkie abandoned her threatening attitude. She breathed on the nails of her left paw and polished them on her right forearm complacently. She even smiled, her good humor completely restored. Henry breathed a sigh. Two distraught humans and a smug skunk started for the "Glass Slipper."

ONCE in Henry's stodgy middle-class sedan, with Henry at the wheel, Eileen recovered her senses sufficiently to demand an explanation.

"Now, Henry, who's your furry friend?" she asked. "And what's all this about?"

From where she was sitting between them, Stinkie giggled maliciously.

The car swerved under Henry's nervous hands. "I don't know what it's all about," he quavered. "Stinkilyn seems to have contracted an embarrassing—uh, fondness for me. You might even call it a *grande* passion."

Eileen believed in going directly to the center of things. She looked down at Stinkie. "Why do you love him? He isn't much."

Stinkie rolled a languid eye. "Why do *you* love him?" she countered maddeningly.

Eileen was somewhat at a loss. "Well, he's—he's kind of sweet."

"Exactly," Stinkie said.

"Besides," Eileen went on, warming to her task, "you get kind of tired of wide-shouldered, slim-hipped heroes. It's a relief to meet a narrow-shouldered guy with a paunch."

"Just so," Stinkie agreed. "Another thing, he's full of practically nothing but the milk of human kindness—a quality rare in the male. I suppose my feeling for him is chiefly maternal." She looked at him mistily. "Good old pot-bellied Henry!"

Henry drew his neck into his collar, turtle-fashion. It was pretty embarrassing to hear two women who loved you dissecting your merits so dispassionately. He *did* wish they'd stop discussing his charms quite as if he were not there. To cover his confusion, he kept his eyes on the road with a sort of desperate intensity.

Eileen quite evidently didn't like Stinkilyn, but she wasn't above exercising a little feminine diplomacy. "But look, Stinkie, Henry's human. Or almost. Don't you think it would be wiser of you to center your affections on—uh, a gentleman skunk?"

"I've known *lots* of gentlemen skunks," Stinkilyn said, with a world-weary shrug. "When you've known one, you've known them all. I love Henry."

Eileen and Henry exchanged baffled glances. Eileen made a helpless gesture with her hands. There seemed really nothing more, the gesture said, that she could do.

As if she knew she were mistress of the situation, Stinkie hummed a little air:

"I'm a redheaded woman, lah-de-dah. . ."

AT THEIR table in the "Glass Slipper," Eileen said almost tearfully, "Henry, you'll have to *do* something! I'm not playing second fiddle to a sk-skunk!"

"What can I do?" Henry quavered. He looked over cautiously at Stinkilyn, whom he'd smuggled in under his coat. Some serpent's wisdom had told him that head-waiters were apt to be stuffy about skunks.

Stinkilyn was paying absolutely no attention to them. She was listening to the music with rapt attention, beating time absently on the table with a spoon. A napkin was tied rakishly under her chin. Quite a few people were staring at the trio.

Eileen was embarrassed. "You'll have to do something. People are looking. Perhaps—oh, say! Suppose we get Stinkilyn blotto? Maybe she'll go to sleep."

Henry brightened. He crooked a finger at their waiter. "Two Scotch highballs, Jack. And—uh, some Vat 69, straight in a *demi-tasse.*"

The gaunt waiter looked a little startled. "Vat 69 straight, sir, in a *demi-tasse,* sir?"

Stinkie stopped listening to the music. She ran a tongue over her evidently dry lips. "You heard him, Jack. And toss a little gay abandon into it, willya? In other words, step on it."

The waiter went white as a sheet. He stared at Stinkie, and looked like a man who couldn't believe he'd seen what he'd seen. Or heard what he'd heard. Then a doubtful smile cracked his dour features. He looked at Henry in relief.

"Oh, I see, sir. You're a ventriloquist, sir?" Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" Henry echoed, wishing that he might fall through the floor.

Eileen tried to look as if she weren't sitting at the table with either of them.

Stinkie winked at Henry. "Oh, boy, could Jack ever be wrong, though, huh?"

The waiter tottered away, glancing back occasionally over his shoulder. When he came back, he served their drinks hurriedly, a badly shaken man.

But alas! Henry thought, for Eileen's plan. For Stinkie, instead of sleeping, grew noisy and gregarious in her cups. She wanted to sing. She wanted to visit from table to table. Above all, she wanted to dance. Once she went to the powder room, and weaved back giggling. "Boy, was my nose—*hic!*—shiny."

Henry carefully avoided Eileen's eyes.

"You'd better dance with her," Eileen said coldly, "before she gets us tossed out of here on our ear."

It was a rhumba. Ordinarily, Henry wouldn't have been able to do it. But he was more than a little lit himself by now. As Stinkie wasn't very tall, even standing erect on her hind legs, Henry had to crouch in a particularly repulsive fashion. This posture, together with the abandoned wiggling of the anatomy necessary to the rhumba, caused among the other dancers quite a bit of comment—most of it unfavorable. Henry was aware of icy stares, but they didn't cool him off. He was all in a glow.

Stinkilyn said rapturously, "I could go on and on."

Henry couldn't.

When the dance ended and they returned to the table, he asked Eileen nervously, "How did we look?"

"Damn silly," Eileen said. She was wielding a lipstick with a curious air of finality. Henry's heart plummeted to his heels.

"You're not—going?" he faltered.

"I've had all one woman can stand." Eileen bit off the words. She went on, a shade theatrically, "Painful though it may be, Henry, I'm afraid we've reached a parting of the ways."

She stood up and pushed back her chair so abruptly that it bumped into the gloomy waiter. He teetered desperately, and tried to right the tray he was holding aloft. But he was too late. It tipped, carrying a brimming glass with it.

Stinkilyn, who had resumed her chair, was deluged from chin to tail. There was one long moment of dreadful silence, then:

"Why, damn your clumsy eyes!" Stinkie screamed, dripping. "Just for that I'm gonna blow this dump wide open!"

Pandemonium broke loose. Women screamed. Strong men uttered hoarse cries. Eileen vanished in the hubbub. A bouncer rushed over, flanked by two waiters. The gaunt waiter pointed at the shrinking Henry and yelled, "This here's the guy. A ventriloquist. And he's got a skunk with him!"

The bouncer and his cohorts closed in. Someone threw a bottle. The lights went out. Henry remembered nothing more.

THE gutter was no Beautyrest.

Henry groaned, and opened his eyes reluctantly. Stinkilyn was sprawled across his stomach, deep in a drunken sleep. There were two blue tree-trunks directly in front of Henry's jaundiced gaze. He followed them upward apathetically to where they blossomed into the rosy Irish face of a policeman.

A ham-like hand gripped Henry's collar, and yanked him to his feet.

"Thir'rty years have I, Michael Murphy, pounded this b'at, but niver have the eyes of me seen so dis*gust*ing a sight!" The officer shook his head sadly.

Stinkilyn, who'd been unceremoniously dumped into the gutter and wakened, eyed Murphy with distaste. "I'll get your star for this, you stupid flattie, you!" she snarled.

Henry shuddered and closed his eyes. When he opened them again, Murphy's rosy face was an eggplant.

"'Tis very clever you are," Murphy told Henry softly. He shook him, not gently. "A ventriloquist, is it? Come along, and bring your pet wid ye. Yez can tell your story at Night Court to Judge Grooch, the Terror of Three Rivers."

"Officer, I—" Henry began.

"Shuddup!" Murphy said. He added thoughtfully, sucking air through his teeth. "Yez,'ll get the chair for this, or I don't know Judge Grooch."

Henry could almost have welcomed the

chair. What had life to offer him now? He'd lost Eileen, the only girl he'd ever loved. And now—this added disgrace. He, who'd never been arrested before in his life! With a sinking heart and downcast eyes, he picked up Stinkie and waited while Murphy called the wagon.

Murphy, Henry reflected later, evidently knew Judge Grooch only too well. Judge Thaddeus Grooch was a choleric little man with a very red face, and thin tufts of cotton for hair and chin whiskers. He suffered from chronic dyspepsia, and his temper was not of the best.

Night Court itself smelled of carbolic acid and sweating humanity. Henry didn't like it.

Judge Grooch stalked in, looking neither to right nor left, settled himself on the bench, and arranged his robes about him to a nicety. He saw the skunk for the first time, and carefully averted his eyes. Then he favored Henry with a long scrutiny. Somehow Henry got the impression that the judge didn't care much for him.

"Well, Murphy," Judge Grooch squeaked at last, "and what's this beauty in for?"

Murphy cleared his throat importantly. "Drunk and disorderly, distur'rbing the peace, resisting arrest, insolence to an officer, AND—"

Judge Grooch held up his hand. "Enough!" he said. He gave Henry a glance of acute dislike. "I can see for myself the man has a criminal skull."

"Your Honor—" Henry began desperately.

"Thirty days," said Judge Grooch.

"But, Your Honor—"

"Sixty days," said Judge Grooch.

"But, I—" Henry wailed.

"Ninety days," said Judge Grooch. "Do you want me to lose my temper? Not for nothing am I called 'the Terror of Three Rivers'!" He clawed at his head, tearing out a tuft or two of hair.

Henry shrugged his shoulders in helpless defeat and was about to turn away when Stinkilyn took the situation in hand. She sat up on her haunches and glared at Judge Grooch.

"Your Honor, my disposition is just as lousy as your own," she snapped. "Let my boy friend go, or so help me I'll fix this courtroom so it smells worse than it does now!"

"Who spoke?" Judge Grooch half-rose from the bench and peered over his desk. "Who had the temerity to tell me I have a lousy disposition? Who suggested my courtroom—uh, smells?"

Murphy cleared his throat again. " 'Tis this here guy, Your Honor. He's a ventriloquist." And he pointed to the cowering Henry. "He makes his voice come out of the skunk."

"Ah!" said Judge Grooch ominously.

Desperation lent wings to Henry's tongue. "Your Honor, I'm not a ventriloquist. This skunk can talk. And I can prove it—"

JUDGE GROOCH sank back in his seat. "I'm a reasonable man. I'll give you just two minutes to tell me why I shouldn't give you a year."

Henry straightened with faint hope. "Your Honor, let Officer Murphy take me out into the hall, and close the door. If the skunk talks to you, you'll know it's not me. I'll be too far away."

"Done!" said Judge Grooch.

Henry suffered himself to be led down the aisle by Murphy. At the door, Judge Grooch called, "If I find you're wasting the court's time, you'll rue this day, I promise you!"

Henry shivered. He threw a glance of appeal at Stinkilyn, who was watching the proceedings with bright eyes. She waved a paw airily at Henry.

"And, Murphy," Judge Grooch added. "Just as an added precaution, keep your hand over the fellow's mouth while you're out there."

"Yes, Your Honor!" Murphy said, as if it would be a pleasure.

Henry suffered the agonies of the damned during the three minutes that ensued. Knowing Stinkilyn, he felt sure it would be just like her to refuse to talk. And then where would he be? When the door opened, and a bailiff said, "You can come back now." Henry walked down the long aisle with a pounding heart.

The courtroom was ominously silent. No one was looking at anyone else. The judge's face was set into a mask of rigidity. Only Stinkie seemed at ease. She was covering a

yawn with a polite paw. Henry's heart misgave him.

Judge Grooch leaned forward. "Henry Hildreth, the court finds that you've been telling the truth. You are free. BUT—with one condition."

Henry caught his breath. "Yes, Your Honor?"

The judge pointed a shaking finger. "The court gives you just one day to get rid of that — that *animal!* If you still have it twenty-four hours from no, I'm sending you to the chair! Now clear out!"

Henry started.

"Stop!" Judge Grooch called, and Henry's heart sank. Had the judge been playing with him? But the judge only pointed to Stinkilyn. "Take her with you."

Henry scooped up the willing animal, and fled to the outer air. It wasn't until they were back in the sedan, headed for home, that Henry looked at Stinkie suspiciously.

"Just what did you say to Judge Grooch?"

"Oh, we chatted about this and that," Stinkie said demurely.

"Such as?"

"Well—" Stinkie giggled at the memory. "I recited a limerick."

"A limerick? What kind of limerick?"

Stinkilyn made a great show of searching her memory, though it was perfectly obvious to Henry that she remembered it very well.

"Tell me," he gritted, "or I'll—"

"It went like this," she said imperturbably, and quoted in a nauseating singsong:

"There is an old judge of Three Rivers
Whose stupidity gives me the shivers
But soon he'll be dead
From scratching his head
And running his hand full of slivers!"

And Stinkilyn dissolved into strangled giggles at her own wit.

It was a wonder to Henry that they'd escaped with their lives.

THE world was just one great big eight-ball to Henry next morning. And he was behind it. He'd lost Eileen. He was practically under sentence of death unless he got rid of Stinky. And—he still had Stinkie. All very well for Judge Grooch to tell him to get rid of Stinkilyn. But how? Ah, Henry thought, that was indeed the question.

He was sitting slumped despondently at his desk in the Museum when Stinkilyn wandered in, yawning, and primed to talk of the past night's exciting events. She leaped to his desk with a groan, and sat there companionably.

"What a night!" she said. "My feet! That blitzkrieg rhumba of yours like to laid me out." And she giggled reminiscently.

Henry was not amused. If there was one thing in life he wanted to forget it was the memory of last night and its whole ghastly chain of revolting events.

"Stinkie," he said sternly, "I'm going to send you away."

"That's what *you* think," Stinkie said, with a gamin grin.

Henry clutched at his composure with both hands. He tried again. "Stinkie, you heard Judge Grooch. If you really love me—"

"I do, darling. I truly, truly, duly do!" She leaned over and patted his shrinking cheek with one small paw. "As for Judge Grooch, pooh for Judge Grooch!"

Henry groaned. He might just as well go and leap off a dock. There was no other way out. There was only one thing to be thankful for. Stinkie had already done her worst. Henry clung to that comforting thought as a drowning man to a straw. Stinkie couldn't possibly do anything more to disgrace him.

He didn't know Stinkie.

"Hark!" Stinkie said. She cocked her head at the sound of a car in the driveway. "Visitors?"

Maybe it was Eileen! And then Henry remembered. Remembered with one horrified intake of breath. He didn't know how it could possibly have slipped his mind. But today—*today* was the day for the annual visit of L. Ponsonby Maxworth, the millionaire, the Museum's greatest benefactor, the man to whom Henry owed his very job and existence!

Henry leaped up. But it was too late. L. Ponsonby Maxworth entered the study, preceded by his stomach. He was clothed in the aura of his twenty-three millions, and chuckling unctuously.

"Dear old chap!" he said to Henry, patro-

nizingly. "What's this I see in the morning papers about your genius for ventriloquism?"

It was only too evident from his smile that he'd read only the headlines—and those perhaps on the fly. He couldn't have read the whole ghastly story. Henry breathed deeply. Perhaps the situation might yet be saved. But there was one thing he could allow to go no farther. He must destroy, without a minute's loss of time, L. Ponsonby Maxworth's illusions as to his ventriloquial gifts.

"Mr. Maxworth," Henry said bravely, "you're mistaken. I'm *not* a ventriloquist."

"Not—?" This was perhaps the first time in his life that L. Ponsonby Maxworth had ever heard anyone say him nay. The great man was offended. L. Ponsonby Maxworth was *never* mistaken. He wagged a minatory finger. "Contradicting, Henry! Contradicting, up and down!"

Henry turned pale. He opened his mouth to apologize, which was unfortunate.

For Stinkie chose that moment to say, "Henry, you do know the most fat-headed people!"

L. PONSONBY MAXWORTH couldn't believe his ears. He stared at Henry, who quailed. He stared at Stinkilyn, who returned his stare blandly and quite without awe. The great man collected himself.

"Woe betide the prevaricator, Henry!" He added portentously, "I trust there will be no repetition of this unfortunate—uh, jest."

Before Henry could prevent it, Stinkilyn said, "Henry, who *is* this pompous old windbag?"

Henry sank into a chair. L. Ponsonby Maxworth closed his eyes, and sighed. He said, "Henry Hildreth, your connection with this Museum is severed. You are, in a word, sir, discharged. As of this instant."

And L. Ponsonby Maxworth turned and made for the door with ponderous tread. As he went out one door, Murphy entered by another. Officer Michael Murphy, who stopped and stared, more in sorrow than in anger, from Stinkilyn to Henry. Henry blushed at the reproach in that silent glance.

"Do me eyes deceive me?" Officer Murphy asked sadly. "Kin I believe the ivvidence of me own senses? Come along, now. Wait'll His Honor learns ye've still got that dis*gust*ing animal."

"Disgusting animal, your ownself—" Stinkie began spiritedly. And kept it up all the way to the Municipal Building.

The human being can bear just so much, and no more. Once the breaking point is reached, a sort of automatic anaesthesia is set up by the brain, easing most of the pain.

Thus with Henry Hildreth.

Through a merciful haze, he was but dimly aware of the sights, sounds, and smells of Judge Grooch's courtroom. It seemed that he had scarcely been away. It might, indeed, have been the same scene, except that a glamorous woman reporter had been added. Someone had seen a human interest story in the affair.

Again Judge Grooch entered. Again he arranged his robes to his own satisfaction. Again he viewed the motley crew before him with a lacklustre eye—Officer Michael Murphy, Henry Hildreth, and Stinkilyn.

From somewhere about her person, Stinkilyn had produced a hand mirror. She was promenading now in a circle, regarding her small face in the mirror which she held aloft. It was distressingly evident that she was still unabashed, for she was singing:

"Oh, that redhead gal!
Oh-ho-ho-oh, that redhead gal!"

And when she saw the judge, Stinkilyn walked toward the bench with an exaggerated swaying of her hips to salute him with an offhand, "Greetings, chump. How's the boy?"

Henry waited for the explosion. But Judge Grooch didn't say a word. His eyes only swept the courtroom like an airplane beacon, daring anyone to titter. There was something ominous about his composure. He had the air of a man biding his time, secure in the knowledge that he held the winning card.

BUT before the judge could open his mouth, there was a dramatic interruption. The nail-studded leather doors of the courtroom were thrown open, and a tear-stained Eileen rushed down the aisle to take her place at Henry's side. From somewhere, he supposed, she'd heard the news of his re-

arrest, and her tender heart had been touched.

Stinkilyn jumped to the judge's desk for a better view of the newcomer, and when she saw who it was, she bristled.

The judge's gavel rapped for order. He cleared his throat, and spoke directly to Henry.

"Why did you not rid yourself of this animal as ordered? Before I sentence you, satisfy an old man's curiosity, will you? What sneaking fondness do you entertain for this animal, that you can't give her up?" Here he threw a disparaging glance at Stinkilyn that would have withered a less self-assured skunk. "Do you love the creature, heaven forbid?"

He seemed really to want to know.

Perhaps it was Eileen's arm through his that gave Henry new courage. Perhaps it was his subconscious that suggested the answer. Who can explain these things? But at last his fogginess lifted, and he saw a desperate chance to resolve his difficulties.

"*Love* her? I've been trying desperately to get rid of her," he said scornfully, and his voice was loud and clear. "I love no one but—my wife." And he indicated Eileen.

On the judge's desk, Stinkilyn reeled as from a blow. "You're *married!*" she cried. But she made a quick recovery. "Well, that's okay. I'm the broad-minded type, myself." And she winked, quite in her old manner.

Henry's heart misgave him. It wasn't going to work. But he went on, thankful he was not under oath. He addressed himself solely to Stinkilyn, while Judge Grooch and the others seemed too puzzled to do anything but listen.

"Furthermore, Stinkie," Henry said very sternly, "perhaps you'll be interested to learn that I—we—that is, Eileen is expecting a baby. A baby whose father will be a jailbird—a jailbird whose only sin was that you allegedly loved him and pursued him so heartlessly."

Shaken by his impassioned pleading, his own rhetoric, Henry paused to wipe the moisture from his forehead. When he looked up, it was to see Stinkilyn visibly drooping and hanging her head. Tears glittered in her eyes.

"This is all beside the point," Judge Grooch rasped. "You're still going to jail, Henry Hildreth!"

Stinkilyn held up her paw. "Wait!" While Eileen and Henry held their breath, she peered into Judge Grooch's face. "If I go back to the forest voluntarily, will you free Henry? And will you ask Mr. Maxworth to return him his job?"

The judge hesitated.

Stinkie said mildly, "I think I can feel another limerick coming on."

The judge hastily assented.

Then Stinkilyn went on, muttering almost as if musing to herself. "Maybe my life hasn't been what it should have been. Maybe the world might call me bad, but listen, Judge"—and here her voice dropped low as she patted Judge Grooch's vest—"I got a *heart,* Judge. I wouldn't come between a man and his unborn babe."

There wasn't a dry eye in the courtroom. Judge Grooch blew his nose violently.

"Then clear out, clear out, the lot of you!" he barked. "Case dismissed."

HENRY and Eileen went with Stinkilyn to the road that led into the forest. At the parting of their ways, Stinkie looked up into Henry's face, as if impressing his lineaments into her memory. Her eyes were bright—perhaps with unshed tears.

"Think of me sometimes, and not unkindly, my dear," she said. "I loved you, Henry, after my fashion—not wisely, but too well."

And with these noble words she was gone, an obviously broken woman, down the long lonely road leading to the forest—and exile.

Eileen said tearfully, "Oh, Henry, look at her! She seems so little and gallant and alone."

They watched the small receding figure. Henry swallowed past some obstruction in his throat, and made no answer.

Eileen looked at him. "Whatever made you tell Stinkilyn those lies? I'm not your wife."

"But you're going to be," Henry defended.

"And I'm not going to have a baby."

"But you're going to—"

"*Henry Hildreth!*"

Henry blushed hotly. "I had to say those things. It was my last chance—to appeal

to Stinkie's maternal instinct. Remember? She said she had one."

Again they turned to look after Stinkilyn. The next instant they were both galvanized. For now they saw that Stinkie's hips were once again swaying with their old assurance. And she was singing her old ribald song:

"I'm a redheaded woman, lah-de-dar!"

Eileen clutched at Henry's arm. "What's that she's got?"

His heart skipped a beat. Appalled, he cried out, "Stinkie, what's that you have in your paw?"

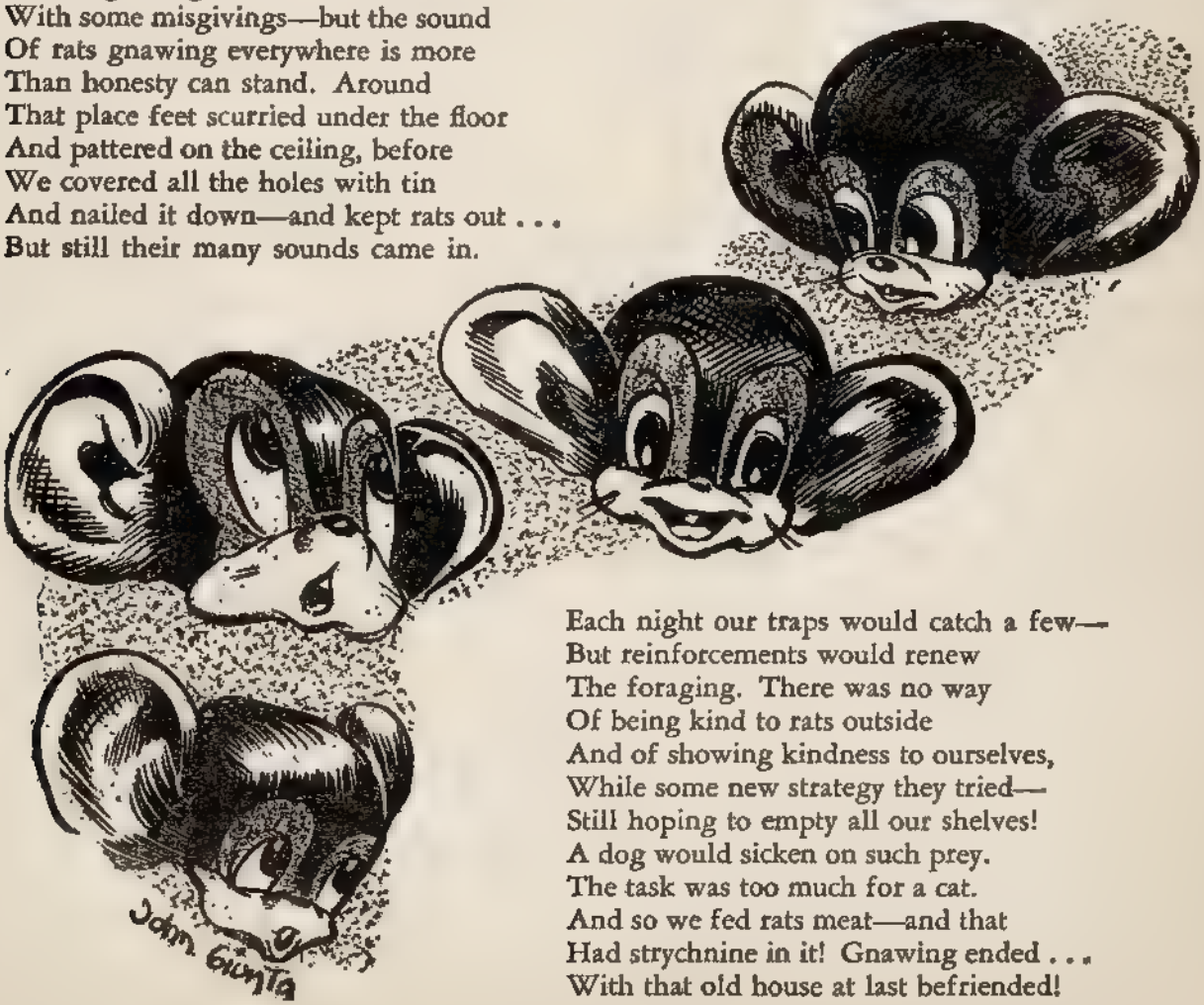
The little black and white figure didn't falter. She was almost at the forest now. Just before she disappeared she held the shining thing aloft. Faintly her voice came back to them:

"This?" she caroled smugly, and her giggle was unregenerate as ever, "Why, this is a bottle of 'Everywoman's Love Life' perfume I lifted from that newshen. There's a twenty-percent tax on cosmetics now, you know, and maybe I couldn't have afforded to change my scent occasionally. I might want to; you never know!"

Rats

BY GLENN WARD DRESBACH

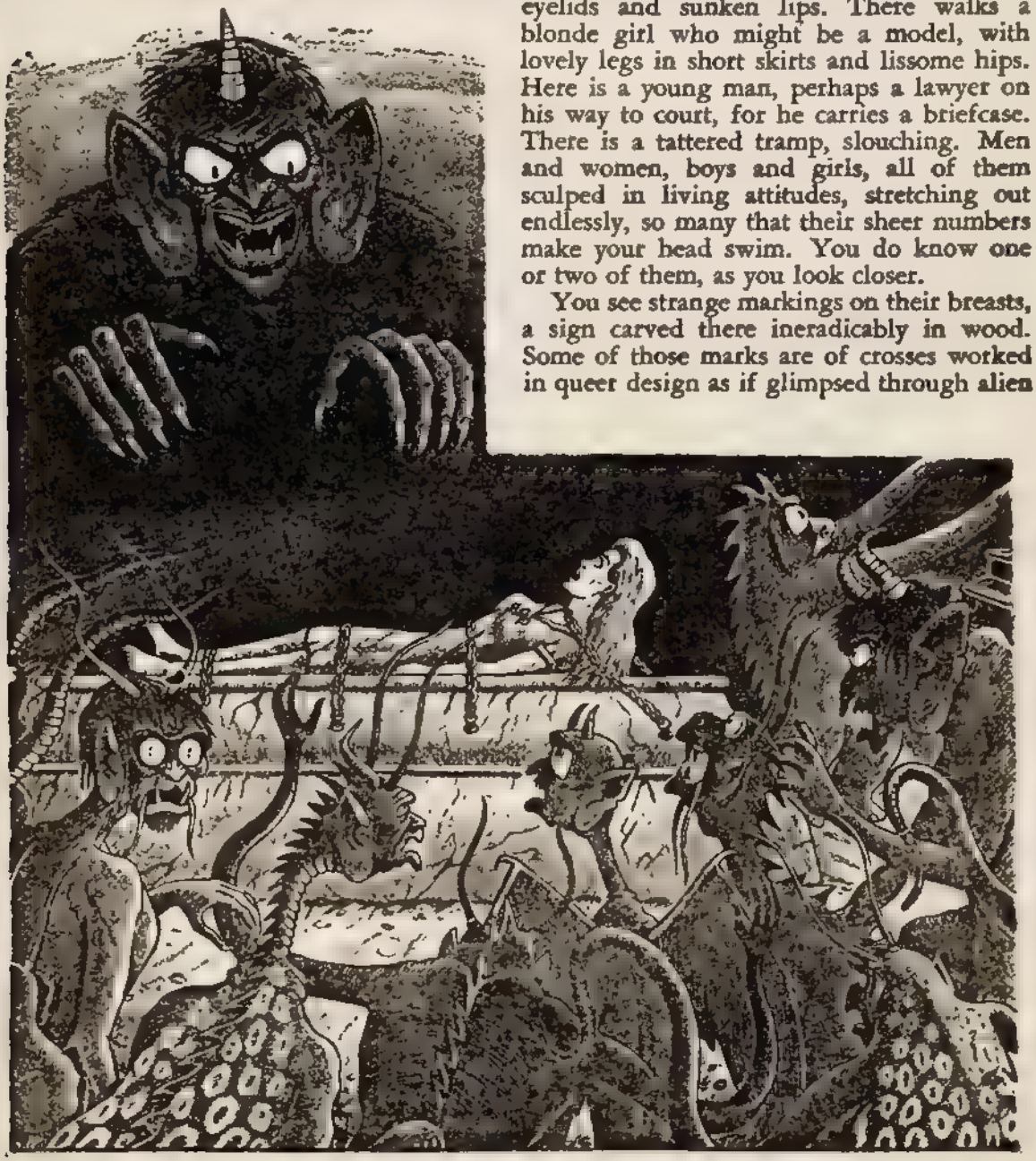
WE HAD moved into a stanch old house.
But we had not expected to find
So many rat holes. Even a mouse
Nibbling at night can trouble the mind
With some misgivings—but the sound
Of rats gnawing everywhere is more
Than honesty can stand. Around
That place feet scurried under the floor
And pattered on the ceiling, before
We covered all the holes with tin
And nailed it down—and kept rats out . . .
But still their many sounds came in.



Each night our traps would catch a few—
But reinforcements would renew
The foraging. There was no way
Of being kind to rats outside
And of showing kindness to ourselves,
While some new strategy they tried—
Still hoping to empty all our shelves!
A dog would sicken on such prey.
The task was too much for a cat.
And so we fed rats meat—and that
Had strychnine in it! Gnawing ended . . .
With that old house at last befriended!

The Weirds of the Woodcarver

HE DWELLS in a dusty little shop off a side street in downtown Brooklyn. The dirt on the windowpanes is thick and grimy, as though unwashed for years. But when you open the door to the shop itself, a new world unfolds before you.



First you see the tiny figurines standing on their shelves, painted and carved in exact similitude to living beings. They stand there, row on row. If you look closely, you can see people you know. There is an old woman in a shawl, sorrow etched into her drooping eyelids and sunken lips. There walks a blonde girl who might be a model, with lovely legs in short skirts and lissome hips. Here is a young man, perhaps a lawyer on his way to court, for he carries a briefcase. There is a tattered tramp, slouching. Men and women, boys and girls, all of them sculped in living attitudes, stretching out endlessly, so many that their sheer numbers make your head swim. You do know one or two of them, as you look closer.

You see strange markings on their breasts, a sign carved there ineradicably in wood. Some of those marks are of crosses worked in queer design as if glimpsed through alien

By GARDNER F. FOX

eyes. Some other marks are—well, different. You are not able to discern their twistings, somehow, no matter how you peer and strain. For those marks are unearthly, cosmic, of the realms of some purple hell spawned before the planets. Involuntarily, you shudder a little. You feel cold. And no wonder, for you are facing the signet of all the evils of all the ages of all the universes. . . .

Look now at the small man seated behind the hacked and pitted bench. He peers up at you over the battered edges of his cheap glasses, his head held slightly awry, as though it were too heavy for his neck. His eyes search you, go deep within you, probing, seeing something you have never seen, and only admitted to yourself on a dark night, in bed and alone, and afraid. . . .

I drew a deep breath. He was looking at me like that, searching, hunting. I felt queerly relieved when he smiled.

"I'm a reporter," I managed. "I'd like to do a little article on you for the Sunday supplement. They say you're the oldest woodcarver in town."

He smiled and nodded.

"I guess so. Yes, I must be. I have been here a long time. A very long time. Too long."

His voice was deep, throbbing, resonant. An odd voice for such a little man. It conveyed notions of other forms of life, of beings vast and powerful, of other worlds where life took different paths.

"Then you will tell me about yourself," I hurried on, eagerly. "If I get an interview, I'll get a raise, and—"

"—and you will be married."

Heading by MATT FOX

There have been strange creatures generated in the billions of years that Earth has known; the strangest of these—the Primal Ones!

It didn't seem strange, his guessing. You sort of expected it from him, sitting there so little yet so big, among those untold thousands of little statues. Funny, but none of them seemed to be for sale.

"I will tell you all about me, yes," he said slowly, his eyes dreaming. "I will tell you of this my life here as it has been. Yes, I will tell you. It has been long since I spoke with anyone. What do you want to know?"

I sat on a dusty stool and gestured at the carvings on the shelves.

"About those. They're all so different. All alive. How can you ever pay for all those models! It must cost a fortune."

His smile was slow and somehow—frightening.

"I do not pay. Those people have passed my window at some time or another, during their lives. All of them. I look at them—and remember. I carve them as *I* see them."

I started suddenly, half rising to my feet. Here and there among those statues I saw faces I knew: Bill Henry from the insurance company at the corner, Ellen Jackson, Flo Bentley who painted those lovely miniatures that were such a rage now, Gus Johnston . . . yes, people I knew, people I had talked and laughed with. Looking at them standing there, I had an uncanny feeling that I looked at the living person, so perfectly were they made, so exact their features, their coloring. It was not a nice feeling, especially seeing those queer signs on their chests.

Ellen Jackson had that other sigil on her bosom, that queer, somehow evil twisting of unprintable symbols. She had been in a horrible accident some months ago. Today she lived a hopeless cripple, both legs gone, face ravaged by scars, her eyes forever blind. I shuddered, looking again at that sign.

Bill Henry had the cross on his chest. He had risen swiftly in the insurance ranks, a recent member of the Billion Dollar Club. Flo, too, bore the cross, and she had already begun to make a name for herself as an artist. Gus—well, his house had burned down and Gus had had a lovely wife and two kids. It was a terrible fire. Gus didn't find much when he got home. Just a few charred embers.

I closed my eyes, thinking it is their fate that is graven there, their good luck or bad. . . .

"You are right," the carver nodded, his eyes watching me. He drew a deep breath and looked at his hands. "It is a long story, how I came to be here. I do not know just how to tell it. Perhaps it will be easier if I show you some of my older carvings."

I got to my feet and followed him. He lifted a trapdoor in the unswept floor and started down. He held a candle in his hand, but turned on the electric switch.

Catching my look of surprise, he explained, "The candle is for the lower cellars. Sometimes even I—do not like to see too much of those."

THE chamber extended far back, into a vast dimness. As I stood beside him, staring at the countless hundreds of thousands of carvings, I began to quiver. These men and women were not like the ones in the shop above. No, those people wore beaver hats and carried rifles and powder-horns, or wore bustles and bonnets, or blue cloaks and tri-cornered hats. I saw hunters clad in buckskin, warriors in buff-and-blue, women in crinoline and gingham. Here went a coach-and-four, a sedan chair.

"These—these styles," I said. "They—they're of past centuries. The eighteen-hundreds. Colonial days. Early Dutch colonists. And you carved them?"

"Oh, yes," he nodded. "I did each one of them. It didn't take long. I can work very swiftly when I want to."

It was a large chamber, that cellar, stretching back under the street like a huge cave. And the shelves that filled it were crowded with images. It was like looking at an exhibit of American history.

But it wasn't that that shocked me so much. It was my own calm acceptance of the fact that each of those figures had passed before this man, at sometime in the past. Why, I thought, he must be at least four hundred years old!

"There are some sub-cellars," he whispered hoarsely in the dimness ahead of me. "Come, I will let you look on those. They are even—older. I have not been down below for—some time."

Down stone steps hewn from living rock we passed, into a coolth that chilled.

The shelves stretched into blackness, but I saw well enough to suit me from the light of a single electric bulb that burned eerily. Medieval knights were here, and Vikings,

and Visigoths in armour bearing swords and shields. I caught glimpses of Romans and Carthaginians, of Phoenicians aboard their fleet galleys, of Egyptians wearing the uraeus. To one side naked dancing girls postured before the Pharaohs, and bearded kings of Babylon shot arrows at rearing lions. I noted curl-bearded Assyrian warlords in their chariots. Rulers of cities that were thriving before the first stone of Ur was laid passed before my eyes. Naked cavemen peered back at me as my eyes ranged those mute millions.

"There is one more sub-cellar," said the woodcarver, as he looked at me, my throat dried up.

"One more?" I croaked. "Bu—but these were the earliest men ever known!"

I was behind the stage of reasoning. My brain whirled with what I had seen. The history of a planet had unfolded before my eyes, and still—there was more to see! I asked myself *how old is this man before me?*

"There were—beings—here before ever man was dreamed of," said my guide softly. "The Earth is old. Go learn just how old it is . . . if you can. Why should man think he is the only form of life that has been generated in the billions of years that Earth has known? Man is a parasite on the keel of the planet as it soars in perpetual journey through the void. Before man was, these beings that I will show you, were. And before them, certain—*others!* Those were named the Primal Ones."

COLD reason threw a chilling blanket over my seething thoughts. What rubbish! I thought, this guy is taking me for one sweet joy-ride, and I'm eating it up as a starving man does food!

I grinned, confident once more.

"Boy, can you sling the words," I admired. "You sure had me going for a while. But I've read those books too. They were good, all right—but you aren't expected to *believe* them!"

He was slightly amused at first.

"Some of you humans have guessed," he admitted.

I should have kept calm, but the relief of my reason was like a tonic, and I felt giddy.

"Us humans," I mocked. "What are you but a human? Sure, and you're taking me over the jumps. I suppose you're something else, huh, bud? You aren't human, are you? Nuts!"

The little man grew rigid. His eyes iced over, grew cold, baleful. They glittered at me.

"So," he whispered softly. "You do not believe. No, you do not. And yet—you came in here for a story about—me!"

"That's right," I maintained, grinning. "And I'm getting one. You certainly can carve, all right. I won't deny that. But anyone can carve ancient Babylonians in war chariots, and Assyrians with their curled beards, and hunters in buckskin!" I slapped him on the back. "I hand the palm to you. You made me swallow that yarn of yours for a moment. It was good. Imagine the headlines—'Immortal Being Carves Humanity!' Wow!"

He kept looking at me, evilly, the tiny glints of fire in his eyes occasionally flaring. With his left hand he made a swipe at the nearest shelf, gathered up a palmful of grayish dust-motes. He held out his hand to me.

"You were made from dust like this, mortal. Into dust you shall return!"

He blew on the dust, stirring it. Under his breath it quivered, assumed shape: looked like a man with two arms, two legs.

He lifted his hand, blew breath from pursed lips—blew the dust at me!

It filled my eyes, my nostrils. I choked. . . .

There was an instant of horrible fright, hearing his words from vast distances, graving themselves into my brain.

You want a story. I shall give it to you!

I whirled, reeling; stood upright.

"Oh, God!" I whispered. "Where am I?"

I stood on the sands of a mighty shore, facing out toward a vast gray ocean that swelled and heaved in eternal rhythm. Dimly that voice spoke to me, though it made no sound. I heard it in some far corner of my brain, whispering, counselling.

You are on Earth, mortal. It is a different Earth from those enjoyed during life. There is a doorway to this world. It is—death! *You are not dead. You are under my spell. Seek knowledge of this world. Seek! Seek!*

I staggered up the shore toward the jungle that stretched before me. Through tangled patches of vine and shrub I fought my way. No sun shone bright upon me, for the clouds were monstrous and thick. Yet a

mighty heat pulsed all around, as though the world were spawning all the time, and needed this warmth to hatch its sinful brood. Over everything hung a lowering evil, an evil so intense, so striking that a man's mind could not fathom, it could only cower as it pulsed down upon him. It forced me on, that evil, made me hurry forward. Beneath its gaze, I ripped and yanked a path through interwoven creepers, around gigantic tree-boles, over rotting leaves. My clothes tore, left me half-naked. Great bloody streaks gashed my chest and arms and thighs.

I fell to sleep many times, exhausted. I ate of lush fruit hanging ripe and swollen from drooping branches, and drank from clear streams that rippled over white stones. The days came, and the nights, and the days again. It was endless and—fearful.

I saw things, occasionally. I glimpsed them through the interstices of the leaves and branches: huge, squamous things that *oozed* along. Dimly I heard feet fleeing precipitously from something terrifying. When the footbeats stopped I heard—mad screams! I shunned those oozing things, for the few glances that I had of them froze the very blood in my veins. I hid beneath great leaves, or under tottering slabs of stone when I heard them. When they passed, I ran.

This is a living world, mortal. On it dwell them who serve and worship the Primal Ones. It is very near your own. It is separated only by bands of space and time. Only a Primal One can pass those bands, or one sent by him, or one who is—dead.

I ran, hearing that voice, ran until the jungle was no more, until I came to a great plain covered with short, stiff rubble. At the end of the plain rose the cyclopian ruins of a vast city, its stone walls crumbling and time-eaten, yet still massive and defiant. An intangible spirit of utter malignancy seemed to brood over that mass of rotting masonry, yet to me it seemed a shelter from what I had half-seen—out here.

I ran forward, eagerly. The stubble cut my feet, for my shoes were eaten through, but I did not care. Once within those walls, I would know relief. Between huge stone ramparts that towered high above I sped, onto moss-split blocks of flagging that formed the city streets. Here was safety! Here was escape from those vaguely seen and partly guessed terrors that abode in that loathesome forest!

Here was—horror!

I HUGGED against a wall, staring, paralyzed. I saw them now, coming up the avenue, their hideous heads swaying and waving eerily above thin, stringy necks. Long feelers were wrapped about something that struggled and screamed in mad fear, writhing, twisting.

I covered my mouth with a shuddering hand. I recognized that something struggling in those tenuous feelers. It was a girl, a young girl, clad in the tattered garments of a bygone age. A girl—with a queer, alien mark glowing like live blue fire between her breasts!

They were dragging her toward a huge ruined building, down into its dark depths. I followed, hugging the walls and hiding in shadows. Some partly formed notion of rescue drove me on, though what I could do against *them,* I did not know.

I crept down into the dimness of the tremendous vault where they were gathered. I saw them chain the screaming girl to a flat altar. I heard their shrill cries, in some alien tongue.

Ia! Ia! Fhtagn dy'eth dy'aleth! S'sadauni, s'sathaqua. . . . Ia! Ia!

And in answer to that swollen, sobbing chant, a black being commenced to grow in the dark recesses of the vault beyond the altar: indescribably monstrous, its heaving, pitted sides bulging in ominously frightening ways . . . its eyes that were red blobs in black skin glowing evilly, surveying its worshippers, and its sacrifice . . . its purple wattles quivering . . . its purple cilia vibrating from the massy back. . . .

Human eyes were not meant to see that!

I shivered. I tried to cry, but my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. I fought to free it—

For now I saw what was happening to her who bore that alien sigil on her bosom!

I screamed, then. I screamed, and whirled and ran, up stone steps to the broken avenues, down them and along queerly turning lanes, between the huge walls of the crumbling buildings. Sobbing, I raced on and on. I dared not look behind me. I ran and ran, blindly; and as blindly, I stopped.

The little woodcarver stood before me, in a doorway. He was smiling, holding open the door.

"Save me," I gasped, clutching at him. "Do not let—them—get me! I believe. I do not understand, but I—believe!"

"You were not seen by them," he said to soothe me. "My spell was upon you. Those you saw could not *smell* you."

"Where are we?" I sobbed. "Is it true that this is a—a dimension near our world —a land ruled by—by those Primal Ones?"

"It is your Earth, but a different manifestation of it. It is a segment of space and time that was once ruled by the Primal Ones. Come, follow me, and I will explain it to you—"

He opened another door, disclosed stone steps, leading upward. He began to climb, and I followed.

"Those Primal Ones were deathless. They possessed all knowledge, all wisdom. Theirs were all the arts of science, of medicine, of alchemy. But as the eons rolled past, they grew restless, bored. The galaxies that had been created for them by the One palled. And so, to toy away eternity, they made matter. They made the sun, and the moon, and certain—stars. They made these worlds in bands of differing substance, so that one overlapped the other, in order that the inhabitants of one could not visit those of another unless allowed by them who ruled all.

We went up and up, in the gloom of that somber stairway.

"They had power, and they used it. Infinite power they had. They were gods. But the Primal Ones forgot their real ruler, the One who had made them, and the billions of galaxies for their enjoyment. They dwelt on Earth and were served by their minions. Sacrificed to!" I shuddered, but went on with him, up and up. "Yes, they allowed themselves to be sacrificed to. They enjoyed obscene rites in their walled cities. They created races like the Mi-Go and the TchoTcho to amuse themselves. Their real ruler they soon forgot, having grown mad with lust and power. So they turned to the One and mocked Him. Yes, Him they jeered, Him they taunted, Him they challenged!"

"Fools!"

"One day He struck, and the Primal Ones shrieked in the terror of mad desolation. Gibbering and mowing, they shrieked. Aye, they wept and wailed, for He had turned the Earth on its axis, and buried those cities in which they were adored under tons of ice and snow. In those—other dimensions —that cosmic wrench was felt, too. It smashed inhabitants flat, crushing them. It wiped out whole civilizations of evil beings who were wont to sacrifice and worship.

"Gone were the races they had made, the things they had created out of mud and slime. Yet some few remained. Some few who still—worship. Yes, the abomination of desolation was upon them!"

WE CAME to a door that the carver opened. We went in, and I stood, silent and stunned. For we were on the dirt floor of the lowest cellar of his shop, and a gigantic red ball hung in midair, and lighted the vault with crimson bands of eldritch light.

I saw the forms that brooded there on the shelves, the forms that never should have been made, the forms of appalling madness, of terror beyond any terror ever known. Forms that I had seen. Forms that fought with a—sacrifice! I looked for one moment, and one moment only, at what lay carven in wood on the shelves.

I withered up inside me. My throat was parched. My tongue felt swollen.

I saw things I cannot describe: things I caught but bare glimpses of, back there. Mankind possesses no language that will tell of them, for they were spawned by something alien. Who can describe something man has never seen, or imaged up, or conjured from the purple realms of sleep? Those shapes were bulbous and many-polyped, legged and viscid and oozing, jellied and shaking, amorphous, obscene. Some of them crawled, some flew, some fought and ate what they killed. Some were carven as they sacrificed! and that, I think, was the most horrible of all. . . .

"One there was who did not pass into the outer darkness beyond the worlds where He cast the Primal Ones," I heard a voice drone. "One remained on Earth amid its playthings to while away the eons until He should come again. Yes, one was left to do what he pleased with the beings he and his kind had fashioned from the primeval

mud. His lot to command life and death, pain and joy and sorrow. He could play at wars and famines. He could even send these things called men into other dimensions, to be sacrificed to him when he was in the mood. The doorway was death, and the password was carved on their chests, in wood!

"Such a sentence would endure for ages. One left behind would see many things, as evolution slowly worked its will on the inhabitants of the Earth that remained after the terrible cataclysm that cast the *others* forth. And if that one should take to carving the things he saw lift from the ooze and the slime to crawl or swim or fly, what harm in that? He would see these"—a hand swept the red chamber where stood for all time the replicas of a monstrous spawning—"and later, the great reptiles, the dinosaurs, the pterodactyls, the fabled roc and the unicorn.

"He would be worshiped in divers forms by men who sought for the powers that were his. He would see the efforts of the *others* to come back. But it would all be so boring. So boring!

"He needed some amusement. What more natural than to mark *their* sign on the breasts of the race called men, those symbols of which only he and his kind knew the real meaning? To mark that sign, so that when death came, and the other dimensions were opened to mankind, certain ones would always be on hand to be hunted down by his worshipers for sacrifice to him.

"Eternity is a long time. Even a"—he chuckled softly—"even a god might desire some amusement. And so I return to that other world for worship, to allow myself who thought I was a god, to play at god for all eternity, forever.

"And now you have your story!"

For one instant, as my glazed eyes stared at him, his human form dissolved, and I saw black, striated skin, and glowing red eyes lusting with evil, purple wattles hanging, purple cilia quivering from a ridged back. . . .

I walk the streets today. Oh, yes, I am back on my job. I'm married, too, though I never turned in that article. But I sometimes think that he amuses himself most of all with me. For he can carve me anytime he wants, so he lets me walk about, wondering, wondering. . . .

What sign will he put on me?

And you! Some day he will see you, and you shall join those others on his shelves.

Which will *your* sign be?

To the Moon

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

O PITTED outcast of the fringe of space!
Within a dream I roamed your cratered floor,
Your black abysms, your dead-rock peaks that soar
Nude as a glacier, ashen gray of face.
I viewed your tomb-dark shadows that displace
The shriveling day with cold like the numb core
Of frozen worlds; I ranged the pockmarked shore
Of dried-up seas, and cowered at the base
Of granite pinnacles so sharp and high
They cut the stars with saw-teeth. Yet there shone,
Above those blanks of waterless dune and cone,
One strange romantic splendor. Pale and shy,
A light-globe hinting of some happier zone,
The earth rose golden in the desert sky.

Monsieur Bluebeard

By EMIL PETAJA

Meet the greatest living authority on the Bluebeard legend—and see why no one dares dispute his claim to that dubious honor!

"MISS TWISP!"

No answer.

Malcolm G. Retts, editor of *Ghoulish Shockers* (*Read 'Em and Creep*), put his long forefinger down on the desk buzzer and held it there.

In a moment an emaciated female with stringy hair and large eyes fluttered in, pad and pencil clutched in her elfinish hands.

"Where have you been, Miss Twisp? Out seeing a double feature twice?"

Lila Twisp laughed carefully. But there was no humor in it. She had the appearance of one who has wandered by mistake into a horror museum, and can't find the way out.

"No, sir. There's a strange man—"

"No doubt!" snapped her gaunt-faced employer sarcastically. "Meanwhile I must shout myself hoarse! Well, never mind about that—have you found a suitable autobiographer for our new feature 'Famous Fiends?'"

Miss Twisp gulped.

"Well, have you?"

"I don't think—"

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

"That's just the trouble! You never think! Well, we mustn't expect the impossible, must we, Miss Twisp!" Retts scraped the glass on his desk with his nails, and made Miss Twisp writhe. "Do you realize that we're losing thousands of readers every month! I don't know what's come over this country. Did you get any answers on that questionnaire business we sent out?"

Miss Twisp nodded scaredly.

"Hundreds, Mr. Retts! They all say the same things—the newspapers, true-life periodicals, and newsreels are cornering the horror market.

"The readers say they find our *Shockers* mild by comparison!"

"Do they indeed!" growled the editor. "Is that all they say?"

"There's one more thing," Miss Twisp began meekly.

Her eyes roved to the serried ranks of books and bound magazines that decorated three sides of the ornate office—to one corner, especially.

Retts noticed her fearful glance at the corner shelf.

"Ah! The 'Bluebeard' murders!"

"Yes, sir. The papers are full of it. Last Tuesday it even pushed the Russian campaign back to page three."

"I see."

Malcolm Retts sighed, and cast a fond lingering glance at his favorite collection.

RETTS had made a hobby of gruesome crimes, both ancient and modern. He had made an especially meticulous study of the infamous Baron of the Middle Ages, who was the start of the famous "Bluebeard" legend.

He had accumulated all the literature he could find on the subject, and even, on prewar trips to Europe, had visited the ruins of the old Castle of Terror where Bluebeard had lived—terrorizing the countryside. There he had procured further data about Bluebeard.

Retts boasted that he was the greatest living authority on the Bluebeard legend, and no one disputed his claim to that dubious honor.

Five months ago the city had been rocked to its very foundations by a crime so appallingly grisly that the calloused coroner who was called in, on seeing the body—and what had been done to it—whitened and staggered back, muttering *"Bluebeard!"*

The newspapers took up his cry.

Four more such crimes occurred, with fiendish regularity. They were spaced roughly a month apart, and in each case the victim was found in a lonely spot, weirdly disfigured, with a look of utter horror in his eyes. All newspaper accounts, as well as magazine articles, concerning these killings were carefully cut out by Editor Retts and added to his Bluebeard collection.

"Well, Miss Twisp," Retts asked querulously, "are you quite sure you understand just what my plan is?

"Since the public wants *truth*—we'll give it to them. I plan to interview a fiend personally, and if he can qualify as an authentic subject of horror, I will pay him very handsomely for an autobiography of his—er—activities. That should put *Ghoulish Shockers* back on its feet!

"Remember our mottoes, Miss Twisp!"

"Yes, sir. *'Read 'Em and Creep!'*"

"And?"

"'We Aim to Freeze!'"

"Good! That's all, Miss Twisp. Keep a weather eye out for fiends!"

"Yes, sir. But I wanted to—"

"Run along, Miss Twisp!"

"I mean, I want to tell you that—"

"Well, stop drooling, and tell me!"

Miss Twisp breathed deeply, then took the plunge.

"There's a man in the outer office now, sir. He claims that he is just the sort of—of fiend you're looking for. Shall I send him in?"

The horror editor's blasé old eyes flickered.

"What's he look like?"

"Creepy, sir."

"Good! Send him right in." He rubbed his bony hand along his chin. "No, wait five minutes. I've got to shave first. I'll buzz you."

"Yes, sir," said Miss Twisp, and scuttled out gratefully.

Retts took the electric razor out of his desk, plugged it in, and went to work on his thin, rather cadaverous cheeks.

The editor was very fastidious about his personal appearance. He shaved twice a day, regular as clock-work, and wore a beautiful chestnut toupee that he had bought in Holly-

wood, the home of luxurious wigs, and it added a touch of colorful gaiety to his thin-lipped sardonic face.

He shaved carefully, then sprinkled a generous amount of cologne on. Then he pushed the buzzer, glancing out the window as he did so.

The day was murky. The sky was a mass of sullen black clouds. The air was sluggish, and there was a tendency to rolling fog. Although it was not yet four o'clock in the afternoon, it seemed like evening.

The office door opened abruptly. A man came in.

HE WAS all muffled in an antiquated cape. He wore square dark-blue glasses. He held the top of his cape up so that it concealed most of his face.

"Monsieur Retts?" he rasped.

"This is my private office," Retts said drily, studying the stranger carefully. "And you?"

The stranger looked around the room furtively. Then, seeing that they were alone, he drew closer to the desk. Without speaking, he dropped the folds of his voluminous cloak that hid the lower half of his face.

Retts stood up. He gave a sharp gasp.

"Not—?"

"Yes!" hissed the stranger. "I am *Monsieur Bluebeard!*"

Indeed the mysterious stranger looked the part. He wore a full beard that was not so much pure black as it was *blue* black! It was a most magnificent beard—just like the one Retts had read about in his ancient books. It curled up into little locks, and the tip of each lock was distinctly *blue!* That was how the Baron Bluebeard of the Middle ages had got his name. . . .

Underneath this blue beard the stranger's skin looked brown and dry, like old parchment.

"So you are the *modern* Bluebeard!" Retts exclaimed.

The stranger seemed to smile in his beard.

"Oui, monsieur."

"You are French?

"I *was*."

"Oh. A naturalized American, eh?"

The stranger only smiled.

"Now that I think of it," said Retts, rubbing his lean hands together jovially, "there's a certain old-world charm about you, M.—er—Bluebeard. You remind me of the most dismal slums of Paris. Or perhaps some of the most loathesome aspects of Berlin. . . ."

The stranger bowed.

"Yes, it is just possible that you are the man I have been looking for!"

"Merci," said the stranger courteously. "I hope so, Mr. Retts."

"You need money, eh? Well, I suppose conducting a campaign such as yours does entail a good deal of expense. We shall see. But first, I require some information—"

"Naturalment."

RETTS motioned his visitor to draw up a chair, which he did. He drew out a shabby ancient hand-bag from under his cloak and set it down primly on his lap.

Retts noticed that he wore black gloves. He saw also that his hair hung down to his collar under his musty opera hat.

Retts took all this in with evident relish. Here was a character out of *Ghoulish Shockers* come to life.

"Now, *monsieur,*" Bluebeard asked, in his odd rasping voice, "what is it that you wish to know?"

"You committed the five murders which the newspapers call the 'Bluebeard' killings, I suppose?" Retts asked, toying casually with his sharp paper knife.

"Only four, *monsieur,*" the stranger said quickly. "I regret to admit it. It seems, in the last case, that someone duplicated my—technique so as to divert suspicion from himself."

"Oh? That's hardly cricket, is it?"

"Deplorable!" the stranger hissed. "However, I've been so busy lately. So many diversions—"

"Such as—"

"Well, for one, I simulated a vampire scourge quite effectively in a distant city."

"Interesting. How did you do that?"

"Very simply, *monsieur*. I misdirected blood-donors for the Red Cross to an old deserted mansion where—I think you can imagine the rest!"

"Yes. Very clever."

"Merci. But to proceed with the interview—"

"Yes."

"What information do you require?"

"Well, as you have already learned from

Miss Twisp, we are conducting a departure from commonplace horrors in our magazine *Ghoulish Shockers*. I want to obtain an authentic autobiography by a real fiend. I—er—don't suppose you object to being referred to as a fiend?"

"But no, M. Retts! I appreciate the honor!"

"Good! Well—this is awkward for me—but you see I have to be careful of frauds, and—I must have some proof that you *are* the modern Bluebeard. Now, if you will tell me just exactly how and why you committed—"

The stranger broke in.

"I regret that I am unable to give that information! You will understand why. You see, there are to be *others*—"

"Of course, of course. How stupid of me!" Retts frowned and shook his head. "Well, M. Bluebeard, that seems to be that. Since you can't give us the information we want there quite obviously isn't any story in it. I'll ring for Miss Twisp to show you out. In the meantime, keep in touch—"

The stranger stood up quickly.

"M. Retts, there will be no other time. I will not find it convenient to visit your office again!"

Retts displayed his palms in a significant gesture.

"M. Retts," the stranger suggested, "suppose I tell your readers how, as a child, I—"

Editor Retts, long an expert at browbeating his writers into submissive obedience to his whims, shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

"Frankly," he said, cracking his dry knuckles. "I'm disappointed. I don't feel that you're fiendish enough. I know that it must sound heartless of me to say that, but you know how readers are. They want something really blood-curdling and—well, *supernatural*. In point of fact, they expect it! So you see. . . ."

THE stranger clutched his hand-bag and drew himself up ominously. He set the hand-bag down on the chair. Then his long claw-like fingers reached across the desk—toward the editor's throat.

Retts lit a cigarette.

"*Please!*" he said caustically. "These demonstrations don't impress me at all. They've been tried before.

The stranger drew back, hissing.

"M. Retts!" he snarled. "You force me into revealing something I had sworn to keep secret forever! Now I shall allow you to know my true identity!"

Retts' eyes gleamed.

"Now," he said succinctly, "we're getting some place!"

The stranger folded himself back in the chair like a monstrous bat.

"All right," Retts said. "I'm listening."

"I," declared the cloaked stranger, "am *the original and only Bluebeard!*"

Retts drew in his breath sharply, dropping his cigarette.

"According to my information—and I warn you that I am an expert on the subject—the Baron who was called Bluebeard was burned at the stake in the village square, by outraged peasants under the leadership of some Franciscan monk—way, way back in the seventeenth century!"

The stranger smiled.

"Wizards don't die so easily," he said.

"As you say."

There was a portentous silence. Then the storm-clouds burst in a dramatic trumpeting of thunder. Rain began to lash at the windows.

"Tell me," Retts asked, leaning forward with a shrewd gleam in his eyes, "is it true that you kept your victims—er—chained in dank fungus-grown dungeons of your old castle? Is it also true that they number in the hundreds?"

The stranger nodded.

"Quite true, *monsieur*. One hundred and twenty-three, to be exact."

"That many, eh? Um. We might title the article, 'Wholesale Slaughter.' Tell me more."

The stranger went into minute detail, describing crime after crime of the most diabolical kind. The stories he told would have turned the hair of an ordinary man snow white, and sent him screaming from the room.

But Malcolm Retts was no ordinary man. Besides, he wore a jaunty chestnut wig.

HIS long haggard cheeks and thin lips remained placid, but his eyes glistened.

"And this holy man—this monk. LeCardeau, I believe you called him. He vowed that he would send you to—er—Hades?"

"LeCardeau made a most sacred vow to St. Francis that he would put an end to my activities if he had to follow me to the ends of the earth to do it. It was he who arranged my little barbeque in the little French village.

It was he, also, who sneaked into my castle in the dead of night and put a drug in my wine glass while I dozed by the fire.

"I had my fierce dogs all around me, but for some reason they would not harm him, and made no sound. One might have said he was under the personal protection of St. Francis himself!

"By this trick I was overtaken. Two of my henchmen had been replaced by peasants. It was they who carried me into the village. . . .

"I shall never forget that morning. The sun rose blood-red. The peasants for miles around had gathered to see me die. There was scarcely a family in the entire district who did not have a personal reason for wanting to see me burn.

"A hollow-faced old woman with starting eyes, who had once had three young daughters and now had none, carried the torch, and set it to the dry faggots that were piled up around me. I was most carefully tied to the stake. I could not move so much as a muscle.

"The smoke began to curl up around my face. Tongues of flame shot about my ankles. The villagers shouted and laughed.

"I could see the Abbey LeCardeau, in his brown monk's garb, lift up his silver cross and pray for my soul. . . .

"But I had no desire to die. I called upon the name of my master—"

"Who was?" Retts said softly.

"M. Retts, I had long ago made a pact with one M. Beelzebub—"

"The devil you say!"

"Precisely! And it was he who carried me off, in a puff of smoke, and left a heap of charred bones in my place to fool the ignorant peasants. . . ."

Retts pressed his thin lips together tightly. He was scowling heavily.

"About this pact you had with—his satannic majesty. Of what did that consist?"

"Among diverse smaller privileges, it stated that I could not die except by the hand of the Abbey LeCardeau, and—"

"And—?"

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"And only then by exorcism with a portion of the sacred Staff of St. Francis!"

"Ah!" Retts said, very softly.

Then he rose to his feet like an avenging spectre.

"Who do you think you're fooling, you cheap impostor!"

The stranger rose to his feet, also. They stood face to face across the desk. Rett's face was livid with rage.

"You say I'm an impostor," said the stranger mildly. "Might one ask how you know?"

Retts laughed harshly.

"Elementary, my dear *fake!* You made three important mistakes in your story.

"One—you numbered Bluebeard's victims at one hundred and twenty-three. Actually, there were one hundred and twenty-*nine!*

"Two—you mentioned the name of a certain saint. Had you really been the diabolical Bluebeard you would not have been able to speak his name!

"Third—you said that the only thing that could destroy Bluebeard is exorcism with part of the sacred staff. That is completely wrong. Actually—"

He paused, his thin lips twisting.

"Why don't you finish, *monsieur?"*

"Why should I tell you, you miserable charlatan," Retts said scornfully. "Who are you, anyway? Some incompetent out-of-work writer who—"

THE stranger bent his head meekly.

"You've guessed it, sir!" he said in a crestfallen manner. "My name is Emil Petaja. I live in Los Angeles. I have sent you story after story for your magazine, but all of them have been rejected. So as a last desperate measure I—"

"Hah!" sneered the editor. "I can guess the rest. You heard about my project in getting the autobiographies of famous fiends, and thought you would put over a fast one on me. You would impersonate the murderer Bluebeard and write—"

"No!" protested the crushed stranger appealingly. "I only wished to *talk* to you. I have tried many times, and each time you are too busy, your secretary says. I was certain my manuscripts were being returned unread. I have several right here in my handbag!"

Retts stood over his desk with his hands folded, looking down at the cloaked stranger with sardonic contempt. His visitor had turned his back and was fumbling in his hand-bag.

Suddenly he turned.

"Sir, I am overwhelmed with curiosity. I, too, in my small way, am a collector of bizarre crime stories, particularly those that concern the notorious Bluebeard. Won't you tell me, please, what it is that can destroy this immortal monster—according to the superstition, I mean, of course?"

Retts shrugged.

"I don't know why I should tell a nondescript little fool like you, but—well, the one thing that will destroy Bluebeard is water from the sacred spring of Assisi!"

The stranger quivered in his cloak.

Suddenly his gloved hands flashed up with a little bottle. He uncorked it gravely, and flung it into the editor's cadaverous face.

"Merci beaucoup, le Baron Bluebeard!" he cried out.

Miss Twisp heard her employer's strident scream.

She hesitated a moment, then timidly opened the inner-office door and peeked in.

Her wide eyes beheld Editor Malcolm Retts writhe in agony. She heard again his cry of baffled fury.

She saw his gaunt cheeks become the hollows in the visage of a grinning skull. Then she saw the skull itself crumble into dust. Finally there was nothing left in the office chair but empty clothes—and a jaunty chestnut wig. . . .

Miss Twisp put her hand to her mouth to suppress a wild scream. Her eyes turned to the stranger. . . .

With a single gesture the stranger flung off his blue glasses, his false beard and wig, and his cloak.

Miss Twisp caught just a glimpse of a long brown monk's robe, an austere transfigured face, and a silver cross held aloft. Then the stranger put his slender fingers together in an attitude of prayer, and vanished.

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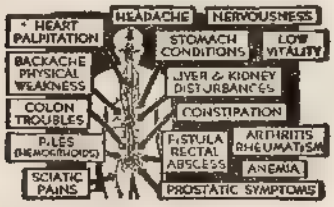

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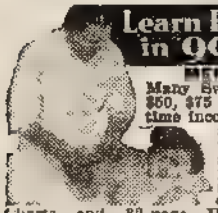

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We've Come of Legal Age

EDMOND HAMILTON, who discovers "The Shadow Folk" for us in this issue, writes:

I have been greatly interested in the letters in recent issues of The Eyrie from some of the older contributors like Manly Wade Wellman, Seabury Quinn, August Derleth, E. Hoffmann Price, Frank Belknap Long and others. In point of time my own first story slightly followed theirs, appearing in the magazine just eighteen years ago.

I never had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Derleth, nor the late Robert E. Howard nor the incomparable Lovecraft, but have had the luck to make personal acquaintance with most of WEIRD TALES' other writers from A. Merritt on along to Ray Bradbury. And I can testify that there really is the unusual affection and loyalty for the magazine of which Mr. Derleth speaks.

Perhaps it is because so many of us, as was the case with me, had our first published stories appear in WEIRD TALES. Since then, I've been fortunate enough to publish several hundred yarns in many different magazines here and in England, including some in Spanish and Swedish versions which I'm wholly unable to read. But I doubt if all of them together ever gave me the thrill I received when the August, 1926, issue of WEIRD TALES appeared with my "Monster-God of Mamurth."

While I've written quite a lot in the detective, adventure and other fields, I'd rather write fantastic fiction than anything else. I think that's true of nearly all fantasy writers, and explains their devotion to this, the oldest magazine in the field.

I speak as a reader as well as a writer, for

I don't think I've ever missed reading an issue since the first one away back in 1923. And now that WEIRD TALES has come of legal age, I hope it's only beginning a long and lusty life.

Edmond Hamilton.

Streets of Defeat

FRANK OWEN tells us more interesting facts on China and reminds us of the debt we owe the Chinese. Let us hope, as Mr. Owen says below, that in "The Long Still Streets of China" the Japs will be overwhelmingly and completely crushed.

For more than twenty years I have been writing stories for WEIRD TALES and interesting years they have been. I believe the stories have been liked because of the lore of old China which I have endeavored to get into them. For the Chinese are very appealing people, so friendly, so human, so forthright. They have given to civilization so very much and have asked so little in return. The very paper on which this magazine is printed would not have been possible had not Ts'ae Lun invented paper in A.D. 105. He made it from the ancient bark of trees—the inner bark. His experiments were sponsored by the Emperor. The finished product was called the Marquis Ts'ae's paper. Nor could writers like me scribble stories had not the pencil been invented by Mung Teen of Tsin (B.C. 246-205). It was called the "Tsin Pencil."

Porcelain, carved jades, tea, rare rugs, cinnabar, and lapis lazuli have come from that fabulous country where there is only one doctor for every hundred and sixty thousand people, where there is so much poverty and famine and suffering, and yet whose untapped mineral resources are so immense they almost seem mythical. No wonder gluttonous Japan is so anxious to swallow this vast country with its age old wisdom. Even in the days of the T'angs twelve hundred years ago China enjoyed as free a press as we have in America today. And freedom of worship was given to all men. Perhaps the Japanese believe that they may be able to absorb something of that intangible quality that makes the Chinese respected the world over.

Po Chui, one of China's greatest poets, used to read his poems to his washwoman to make certain that anyone could understand them. At the other extreme is Lao Tzu's Tao Teh

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King which, though of only five thousand characters, is understood by few living men though it is revered by untold millions.

But I am getting away from what I started to write, of the years I have been writing for WEIRD TALES, of the friends I have made through its pages. The other day, the editor of one of the New York publishing houses sent me a copy of a rare Chinese book of which only a hundred were printed. "Because," he wrote me, "I enjoy your Chinese stories so very much." I have little to say about The Long Still Streets of Evening, but let us hope that the title is symbolic—that in "The Long Still Streets of China," the Japs will meet defeat—devastating, complete, absolute.

Frank Owen.

Background of the "Bookkeeper"

SEABURY QUINN, knowing our peculiar fondness for the "backgrounds" of stories, obliges with that information on his popular "Death's Bookkeeper," which appeared in the last (July) issue of WEIRD TALES.

Jules de Grandin's creator tells us:

I thought that werewolves, vampires, etc., deserved a little rest, so in this instance went directly to the classics for my plot. Specifically, to the Alcestis of Euripides (480-406 B. C.). You may or may not remember the plot of this drama; in case you don't, I'll refresh your memory:

Admetus, king of Thessaly, was ill unto death, and Apollo prevailed upon the Fates to spare him, provided someone would consent to die in his stead. Then came the difficulty. Brave warriors, who would willingly have periled their lives for their prince, shrank from the thought of dying for him in a bed of sickness; his aged parents also shrank from the call, and at last his faithful wife, Alcestis, volunteered to be his surrogate, and went through with it. Alcestis sickened as Admetus revived, and was rapidly sinking into everlasting sleep when Hercules arrived at the palace, hid himself in the death chamber and wrestled with Thanatos (Death) for his prey, finally defeating him. Alcestis recovered and was restored to her husband amid great and (as Euripides spins the yarn) poetical rejoicing.

So here we have an ancient Grecian drama in modern dress with Jules de Grandin substi-

tuting for Hercules, and being just as proud of himself as ever the old Greek hero dared to be of his prowess.

Seabury Quinn.

Humor at War with Horror

To O. Mabbot of New York City has the following to say on Humor vs. Horror in a weird tale:

"I'm glad you printed the letter headed 'Don't Be Funny,' One might raise the purely academic question whether anyone ever wrote a really good humorous weird tale, and win the debate for the affirmative by citing a few examples; but in general, humor is at war with weirdness, and humorous stories of the supernatural are almost without exception flops, or else succeed despite a great handicap. You do not need one an issue—one or two a year will be a remarkably high number to find if you demand the same standard you do for the rest of the magazine. When one augur met another, he laughed—to avert an evil omen probably—and in a weird tale we do not want to drive off the terror by any such deadly thing to spooks as good fun. Humor may be used for relief sparingly (for little relief is needed in short stories), and kindly ghosts and friendly demons are welcome occasionally. But Lovecraft was right in thinking humor usually at war with supernatural horror, and an alliance of the two is at best tenuous."

READERS' VOTE

THE SHADOW FOLK
THE LONG STILL STREETS OF EVENING
THE SEVEN SEAS ARE ONE
BANG! YOU'RE DEAD!
THE DEVIL'S TICKET
PACIFIC 421
SORCERY FROM THULE
THE WAYWARD SKUNK
THE WEIRDS OF THE WOODCARVER
MONSIEUR BLUE-BEARD

Here's a list of ten stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3, respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and mail it in to us.

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4. MAGIC RULER—A 5-inch ruler with hole in center, is inserted in a fancy slotted cover between the covers. A metal fastener locks ruler between covers but the magician removes the ruler promptly. Solid through solid effect! Ruler and cover, also fastener, may be examined. Astonishing!
5. E-Z MONEY VANISHER—Coins, bills, small articles appear or disappear with this clever device. No skill required. Change a penny into a dollar and vice versa.
6. FOOLED AGAIN—A comedy card trick that fools all! One red and two black cards are shown. The red card suddenly disappears and is found in the magician's pocket or under the rug, etc. The original red card changes to a card reading "Fooled" on one side and "Fooled Again" on other side.
7. RED DEVILS—Three red discs are thrown on table by magician. One of the dice is placed in his pocket with right hand and the other two picked up in his left. Yet, when his left hand is opened, it contains THREE DICE. Can be repeated.
8. MYSTIC TAGS—Three tags, colored red, white and blue, are given to spectator, also a string. Spectator is asked to thread tags through top holes, and hold both ends of string. Magician removes center white tag without tearing it. A great stunt!
9. MAGIC RATTLE BARS—Three bars are shown. One rattles, two don't. They are mixed around and spectator is asked to tell which rattles, but ALWAYS fails! This trick alone usually sells for $1.00. It's a honey!
10. AGAINST GRAVITY!—A handkerchief is spread over a board and then two ordinary borrowed drinking glasses placed upon it. Magician turns the board upside down but glasses do not drop. One glass may be removed but other still remains in position. A most mystifying trick but E-Z to do with our secret apparatus.

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• Membership is very simple: just drop us a line, so that we can enroll you on the club roster, and publish your name and address in the magazine.

• A membership card carrying the above design — personal token of your fellowship with the weird and the fantastic — will be sent on request. (A stamped, addressed envelope should be enclosed.)

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We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.

Request

FROM Thorp McClusky, veteran reader of and writer for WEIRD TALES (Mr. McClusky has a story coming in the next issue), we received this plea. We wondered if any of the readers could help him.

Wanted: Back issues of WEIRD TALES for: 1936, June, July; 1937, January; 1938, September, October; 1939, April, June; 1940, February, March, April. Please advise issues available, condition, and price wanted.

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Says Aged Lama

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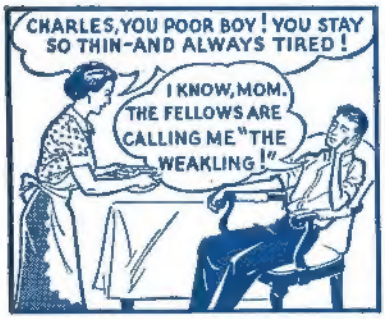

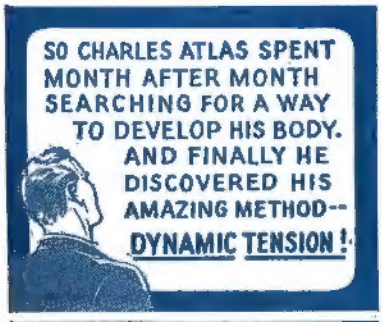

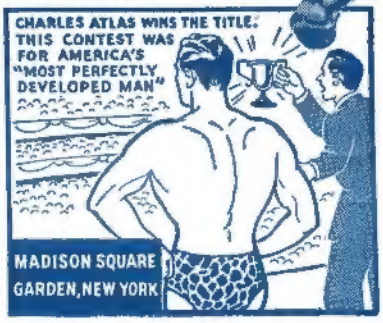

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I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. You simply utilize the UNDEVELOPED muscle-power in your own God-given body — almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY. And it's so easy—my secret, "*Dynamic Tension*," does the trick!

FREE BOOK

Thousands of fellows in every branch of the service as well as civilians have used my "*Dynamic Tension* to change themselves into real HE-MEN! Read what they say—see how they looked before and after—in my book—*free*. Tells all about "*Dynamic Tension*," shows actual photos of men I've turned from puny weaklings into Atlas Champions. And I can do the same for YOU. Mail the coupon *now!* Address me personally: CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9H, 115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9H,
115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y

I want the proof that your system of "*Dynamic Tension*" will help make a new man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

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